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SOCIAL SINNERS.

10/10/1944

SOCIAL SINNERS

J. Nobel.

BY

HAWLEY SMART,

AUTHOR OF "BREEZIE LANCTON," "BOUND TO WIN," "SUNSHINE AND SNOW,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.



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SOCIAL SINNERS.

CHAPTER I.

QUONDAM FRIENDS.

MR. SOLANO walked away from Mr. Prossiter's office in what is denominated "a brown study." "Neat, very neat," he muttered to himself; "to think that old Six-and-eightpence there had so much gumption in him. It was a very pretty trap, and very prettily sprung; and he had me, and no mistake. Done, yes, diddled; and I thought I had rather an easy-going lawyer to deal with. Yes, it's these innocents always do clear us out. The old story.

I thought he was not very good at the game, and he'd two aces up his sleeve all the time. He'd make it lively for 'the Heathen Chinees' even. Vicious old brute, too, he was all for consigning me to dungeons deep, and proceeding to all sorts of unpleasantness. No ; I have made a mess of it ; a great mess of it, and with such a deal better game to play. Only I thought Fred Riversley would never turn up again. I'd never have made such a fool of myself, especially if I had enjoyed a little previous knowledge of Prossiter. However, things were getting desperate, and I thought, with my intimate knowledge of Fred Riversley's life and belongings, I might have made something out of the personation. That's over. What is to be the next move ? ”

Musing in this wise, Solano paced along Great Queen Street and Long Acre, crossed

Leicester Square, and turned up Princes Street, utterly unconscious of an eidolon, in the shape of a seedy looking man, who lounged leisurely after him, never approaching very near to him, except he turned off his direct path, and then dropping back the minute he had again sighted him. He might have been a clerk out of employ; he was Inspector Wilkinson.

“No, Fred Riversley,” continued Solano, pursuing the thread of his meditations; “I’m not going to part with you for the present. I don’t think you can quite afford to quarrel with me. I could divulge enough to swamp you in the London world, and you know it. *Bon camarades* we were once, and I intend we shall be so again; not the less, *mon ami*, because you happen to be so much better worth it now than in the times past. Yes, if he takes to racing, he

will want a master of the horse ; and I don't think Newmarket will get much the better of me. He'll want a confederate, anyway, whatever he may take to, and that I intend to be. Yes, my dear Fred, I intend to be your *fidus Achates* for the present, and will take very good care, for my own sake, you don't fall into the hands of the Philistines a second time."

So scheming, Solano made his way up Wardour Street, crossed Oxford Street, and turning up Wells Street, disappeared, much to Mr. Wilkinson's astonishment, in Fusby's Hotel. Fusby's is not the place to which you would expect a gentleman of Monsieur Solano's doubtful antecedents and principles to betake himself. The detective was somewhat nonplussed. Gentlemen of what the detective deemed Mr. Solano's profession, *i.e.*, swindling, usually give the best hotels or

expensive lodgings the benefit of their patronage, especially when they are artists of the first class, and Inspector Wilkinson unhesitatingly classed the sham Captain Riversley in that category, as he considered that nothing but the audacity born of scores of successful impositions, would have inspired such a bold and hazardous attempt.

Now Fusby's is a retiring fifth-rate family hotel—not an inviting place by any means. Its façade suggests to the observer's mind, bugs ; a glimpse at the coffee-room windows conjures up misgivings concerning the cruets, and doubts anent the purity of the table linen. One feels by intuition that *the* waiter—I doubt a second—as well as the cheeses, are mouldy. I believe the bedrooms to be stuffy, and the washing utensils of limited size. Upon the whole,

I shouldn't much care about staying at Fusby's.

The detective, taking stock of the outside of Fusby's, arrives at all these conclusions, upon the same grounds that the narrator did when he studied Fusby's ; but with the detective it raised this point : why did a man of Solano's appearance and habits take up his abode in a place so opposed to the custom of his brethren under like circumstances ? Bear in mind that Inspector Wilkinson knew nothing of what had taken place in Mr. Prossiter's office, and you will not be so much surprised at the idea that struck him ; namely, that this was the true Captain Riversley, and the gentleman residing at the Bath the impostor ; that latter decidedly the more likely hotel for a first-rate artist to fix upon as his head-quarters.

"However, if I'm wrong," said Inspector

Wilkinson, "I shall try to cypher out this ; and Mr. Prossiter, I take it, knows by this time which of the two is a decided sham. In the meanwhile, it is well to make all safe." And with that the inspector crossed the street, and lounging into the bar of Fusby's Hotel, asked the young lady behind the counter to oblige him with "six of cold pale." Leisurely sipping his brandy-and-water, Mr. Wilkinson was pervaded with an overpowering curiosity concerning Fusby's. It was a very old house, was it not? Not so very. Well, he was surprised to hear that. It was the famous one drawn by Dickens in one of his books. Well, he couldn't recollect which, but it was in one of them. The young lady thought it might be, and wondered whether she was in too. The inspector gallantly replied there could be little doubt about that, if she were only old

enough ; but that book, he thought, had come out seven or eight years back. That settled it, the young lady replied. She had been only there two years, and this was her first place.

“ I suppose you are generally very full,” asked the inspector.

“ Pretty well. We do a fair business.”

“ Country people mostly, I suppose.”

“ Yes ; tradespeople, farmers, and such like. They are good customers, but the first are troublesome about their buttered toast : they seem to think it ought to be all butter ; while the farmers really don't act fair by the cold meat—giving them lunch at eighteen-pence is dead loss.”

“ Yes, those healthy country appetites must be trying for your business ; but I suppose they make up for it in beer.”

“ Oh, they do that ; they are good cus-

tomers to the bar," said the girl, laughing. "Plenty of malt to wash down the beef, and several goes of something hot before going to bed."

"Ah! there's a friend, well, hardly that, an acquaintance of mine, uses your house at times. Mr. Riversley—do you know him?"

"No. I don't even recollect the name; and I think I should. It's rather a pretty one."

"Well, that's odd; because I rather thought if he wasn't actually here now, he had been—dark gent, about forty, rather a swell. Certain to take notice of a pretty girl like you."

"Oh, I don't want customers taking notice of me. I haven't time for such nonsense," rejoined the young lady, with a coquettish toss of her head, that directly negatived the assertion.

“ Ah ! it’s evident you never saw Mr. Riversley.”

“ One’ll get over that if one lives long enough, I dare say,” rejoined the damsel, pertly ; “ but for the matter of that, we have a dark gent, a regular swell, staying in the house now, who always makes me a compliment as he passes.”

“ Ah, but it’s not Riversley.”

“ No, this is a foreign gentleman, I think, though he speaks English beautifully. Monsieur Solano—see, there’s his page in the ledger.”

“ Ah, the good-looking man who passed me at the corner of the street, and came in here a minute or two before me.”

“ Just so ; do you know anything about him ? ”

“ Nothing. He looks a regular swell ; but, bless you, you know all about him At

all events, more than anyone in Fusby's, I'll be bound. His sort ain't likely to talk much to anyone here but you ; and talk we all must. Ain't I running on like an old eight-day clock myself, and with an appointment to keep up at the top of Oxford Street. Good-bye, miss. Mind, I've a card all reg'lar for the wedding, and if he ain't good-looking, I'll forbid the banns."

"Go along with your nonsense," rejoined the barmaid, giggling. "Good-bye, and don't be long before you come and see us again."

"You ! you mean, my love." And with a pantomimic gesture of deepest devotion, Mr. Wilkinson took his departure.

"Curious, this," he muttered ; "living here under the name of Solano. If he's not Captain Riversley, I wonder who he is. I shouldn't think this is his first dive into the

pockets of the public. If he's an Englishman, I should think some of us in 'the Yard' ought to be able to put a name to him; but his putting up at Fusby's is what licks me."

At nine o'clock that evening, Fred Riversley and Monsieur Solano might have been seen seated in a private room at the Bath. Two or three decanters, and the *débris* of dessert, remained on the table between them, and the two men lounged back in their chairs in enjoyment of their after-dinner cigarette, with the aspect of men who had dined satisfactorily.

"We've plenty to talk over since we last met," exclaimed Solano, after a long pause. "I have congratulated you, and now," he continued, as he leant forward for the claret jug, "I'm going to drink your health. Here's a bumper to you on coming into your

inheritance, and may you live long enough to spend every shilling of it."

"You don't suppose I'm such a fool as I was when I had to fly England eight years ago, do you?" retorted Fred Riversley, sharply.

"No, I should trust not; besides, you will have the advantage of being always able to command my advice; and—well, I've been pretty well through the mill."

"It is possible you may not be always available," replied the other, with a sneer. "I've a hazy notion that a stirring up of old stories might make London rather too hot for you."

"I don't deny it," replied Solano, quietly, "but then who is to disturb those pools of oblivion? Not you, for you know nothing of my history further than the guess you have just hazarded."

"You are right, though perhaps a little inquiry might enlighten me concerning it. Whatever you might choose to say to-day in Lincoln's Inn Fields, of course I know that you are an Englishman, and were a man about town at one time. I know also that Solano is not your real name. I sha'n't seek to know anything about your past, unless I find it necessary in self-defence."

"Ah ! I understand ; you wish to have done with me," said Solano, very slowly.

"On the contrary," returned Riversley ; "I think you can be of great use to me ; but the sooner you clearly understand that we stand in very dissimilar relations to each other to those we stood in three years ago, the better. Perhaps it would be as well if I recapitulated them."

Solano emitted a thin cloud of tobacco smoke, but vouchsafed no remark.

“ When we first met abroad, I was a broken man, struggling hard to eke out the trifling annual stipend I still drew from my father, by play—my sense of honour growing duller day by day. It was reserved for you to quench my last spark of self-respect. You found me a man waxing loose in principle ; a few months in your school, and the last shred was gone. It was you first taught me that I was a child in play, as understood in those parts ; that the real science of play was an adroit manipulation of the cards, a shrewd observation of your opponent’s countenance, and the countless other almost imperceptible signs by which a gamester follows the very mind of his antagonist. The night you condescended to give me my first lesson in real *écarté*, I don’t forget. The stake was merely nominal, but the lesson a revelation. You told me I

had the king in my hand upon one occasion of my dealing, and when I asked how you knew it, laughed, and said a child could have guessed it by my glancing at my markers. As for you, you held them when you pleased. It was you preached to me the doctrine that all men who had learned to gamble played in this wise. That the poor fools who played "on the square" (so you called them) only did so for lack of education ; that the game of life was the same all round ; that racing was conducted on the same principle. I knew you lied ; but I was very miserable, very poor, and very weak. I turned robber like yourself, and joined with you in spoiling the Egyptians. You know what a pleasant life it was. We lived on the best ; but under the surveillance of the police. We won with the chance of being called cheats, and kicked, every day of

our lives. Ready to settle matters always with the pistol if we could ; but men of the world don't think it necessary to go out with a black-leg. You were my master then. I want you to understand I'm thoroughly out of leading-strings now."

"Somewhat mawkish sermonizing, my dear Riversley," replied the other, "although I am glad you appreciate my tuition. I found you a mere gosling amongst the game-cocks. I taught you to use your spurs, that's all. If you mean you require a trainer no longer, perhaps not. But there is an old and salutary custom which obtaineth in this country, namely, the pensioning off of old and *valued* servants."

"Ha ! my friend ! you still won't take a hint. Oh, fail not to credit one who has drank wisdom from your lips, with being able to play a handful of trumps against

you. Suppose I say, no : you never get a penny-piece from me—what can you do ? Brand me as a card-sharper ; but do you think society will believe your story ? You all but taken into custody for personating me ; bah ! the detectives were at your heels from the moment you passed Prossiter's door this morning."

Solano could not suppress a slight start of surprise.

"Remember you are playing single-handed against the *bank* this time, if you quarrel with me. I fancy that for a thousand, with the assistance of the police, I could unravel your former life in a very short time. Sir John Riversley's heir, with five thousand a year, and the experience you have taught him, is a very different man to combat from the broken-down greenhorn over whom you obtained such ascendancy at Nice."

Solano had arrived at the Bath with little doubt about reasserting his influence over his old pupil ; but he had lost sight of him for the last four years, and forgot to allow for the effect of that space of manumission on his apprentice. During that time Riversley had assumed supremacy in his turn over many weaker vessels. They met again as cocks of game, both ; and the younger man, with all the advantages of money and position, and appreciating the value of these acquisitions to their last fraction. Solano was much too quick not only to understand all this, but to see that his quondam pupil thoroughly understood it too. That idea, of being under the surveillance of the police, troubled him ; he was averse to people prying into his affairs, especially people of that description. He thought it best to make no answer, but smoked silently on.

“ You saw the king in my face, Solano, that first night at *écarté*, near eight years ago; I see a deficiency of trumps in yours now. Listen to me. I have no knowledge, remember, whatever of your past, and your real name is quite unknown to me. Now, I will draw your English career. You know this London world in a way, but you were never of it—that is, you never were in London Society. How do I know that? By the freemasonry with which those who have mixed with the right people—lived, in short, in the inner ring—always know each other, let our smash be of the heaviest and completest. I’d back myself to pick such out of the ranks of the army, and think they’ve better stuff in them than me, who only turned hawk. What you were I’ve little doubt—a gentleman on the turf, who one knew at Newmarket, Ascot, &c., as long as

he payed. The day came when you didn't. You were well-known about flash billiard-rooms and in the outer ring for some time after, were then the hero of one or two gross turf frauds, of one or two shameful hoccussing cases at cards and billiards."

"You seem to have been compiling my *dossier* with considerable care," snarled Solano, whose face was now set in a sullen scowl.

"Excuse me, this is entirely supposititious history. Allow me to conclude it in a dozen words—debt, implication in a fraud that either did bring you, or you feared would, and thought it advisable not to wait to ascertain, within the clutches of the law, the Continent, and there the last polish was put to your education. I have done. You know best whether the picture is correct."

"I think you might write a sensational novel if you tried," rejoined Solano.

"Biography, you mean. Commonplace, though, — not sensational. My own, indeed, would write something like it."

"Very much so; and the writing of biography is not necessarily confined to you."

"Quite so. Only mine finishes tamely comparatively. You see I never came within the compass of the law."

"And how dare you say I did?" asked the other, sharply.

"I certainly shouldn't till I had gathered the facts from Scotland Yard. I should be very particular as to facts," replied Riversley, coolly. "How absurd to be annoyed at an imaginary sketch. Besides, remember this morning's business."

Solano gulped down his wrath fiercely.

He felt he had been a fool to let that last observation escape him. It was rarely he let his temper get the better of him, but it was galling to find his quondam pupil his master even in that contemptuous cynicism on which he piqued himself. At last he raised his head, and, looking his host full in the face, said :

“It is time this farce was explained.”

“Not altogether a farce,” replied Riversley. “I wished to convince you of two things. First, that you levy no black mail from me ; try it, and you’ll see what comes of it. Secondly, that if you expect help from me, now I have money, it must be as my servant. Of course I am not thinking of anything menial—merely that you carry out what I tell you either in the betting-ring or elsewhere. Think this over. I fancy I shall have call for a man of your stamp ; and, if

we come to terms, would allow you a fixed salary. Here are three ten-pound notes for old times. Come to lunch at two the day after to-morrow and give me an answer. And now good-night. You had better take one of those weeds to walk home with. Lithfield filled my cigar-case as well as my purse this afternoon, and he is a judge of tobacco as of all other luxuries of life."

As for Solano, he mutely took the proffered cigar, rose, wished his host good-night, with the addenda that he would be there to lunch on the Thursday, and found himself in the street in a state of bewilderment. As he strolled home to Fusby's he was still amazed to think how utterly he had been beaten by what he would have termed "a young one of his own training." True, Riversley had held all the cards, and, being most thoroughly cognizant of the fact,

it was impossible their interview could have terminated otherwise. Yet Solano had dreamt of levying black mail heavily in some shape or other on his former pupil, and felt now, as we all do when those we have taught to play rackets, billiards, etc., beat us for the first time. How slow we are to recognize the fact that we are probably going a little off our play, while the young one we gave unlimited aces or points to is coming on. He gammons with us now, and, if a good-natured lad lets us win, although quite conscious he could give us points, and we, in our senile vanity, don't see it, but chuckle and trot off with the gratifying reflection that "there's life in the old dog yet." Quite so, but "every dog has his day," and that we have had ours we're slow to recognize.

CHAPTER II.

MISS MANGERSTON SPEAKS HER MIND.

THE weft of human life is very curious; I will not say to follow, but merely to look back upon. Let any man of forty or upwards look back upon the days he was three or four and twenty, and call to mind his half-dozen great allies of that epoch—a time at which men for the most have elected their career in life. If possible, let him discover what those six men are now doing, and he will be surprised to find how very differently things have gone with them from what they anticipated. The probability is, that three out of the six are seeking a living in totally different grooves from those in

which they originally started, and that out of the remainder, one or two have gone down beneath life's stormy waters—sunk not into the oblivion of the grave perhaps, but into that more terrible oblivion—the Dead Sea of Life. Men and women we never hear of again till two lines in the obituary of the *Times* records their departure from the terrestrial world, to that other still less known world across the Styx.

George Latimer's will has been the means of incorporating the threads of many lives into one woof, and it would have perhaps been better for some one or two of our characters had it never been penned, notably for those who appeared at first most likely to profit thereby.

Miss Clothele and her staff, as Lord Lithfield always called the Mangerstons, mother and daughter, were once again in

Clumbershire. Maude had not met them as yet, but knew that they were staying with Lady Featheringham. It is a glorious September morning, and Miss Clothele and her *l'aide de camp* are wandering about the pleasaunce in front of the house.

"Rather remiss of Mr. Hainton, Caroline, that he has not been over to call on us, don't you think so? He lives no distance off for a man to compass, and he affected great devotion in London, although I have a suspicion it was principally upon Maude Riversley's account."

"Oh, I don't know!" replied Miss Mangerston, quietly. "Mr. Hainton's devotion is a matter of calculation. You were an assistance to him in getting on in society, and, next to dedicating himself to worshipping yourself, it was best to affect adoration of one of your intimates. I don't think

Mr. Hainton very likely to lose his head about any woman—not even you, Ethel.”

“I’ll forgive him that,” laughed the heiress. “But, surely, you’ll admit he was considerably smitten with Maude Riversley.”

“He certainly affected to be, but I was—what shall I say?—well, unfortunate enough to hear Mr. Hainton enumerate his views about women on one occasion, and I’ll admit that I don’t think Miss Riversley or anyone else likely to make a serious impression on that gentleman. My word, Ethel, if I possessed your beauty and attractions, I’d read John Hainton a lesson it should take him a good year to forget, at all events.”

“Hush, Caroline,” replied Miss Clothele, in no little astonishment at the bitterness with which her friend’s concluding sentence had been uttered. “What did he say?”

“I’ll not tell you,” rejoined the girl,

sullenly. "You think well of him, and think perhaps he's serious in his attention to your favourite, Miss Riversley."

"I don't suppose he is engaged to her, but I certainly fancy that he is in earnest."

"You will see. John Hainton in earnest about any woman—not he. He regards us all as puppets. You, with your beauty and reputation as *one* of the belles of the London world, might turn his head as might anyone of your compeers by flattering that key-stone of all humanity, his vanity. But, my dear Ethel, I'd give you seven years, and still be bound you hadn't got to his heart."

"You mean we can't get at what don't exist," observed Miss Clothele.

"Just so; and the more I study men the more certain I am that they are more easily influenced through their vanity than through their affections."

The enunciator of this cynical aphorism, we must remember, was deemed somewhat stupid by society generally.

“Hush, Caroline! What quarrel have you with them that you should rail so bitterly against the other sex? Surely, so far you, like myself, have experienced nothing but kindness and courtesy at their hands.”

“Yes, but that does not obscure my powers of observation. I don’t talk much in society, as you know, Ethel. Society, in its wisdom, thinks me a fool on that account, but I can see if I can’t talk. People are kind to me because I am under your protection, and you will have it so. They bow to you. Why? Because, thanks to your beauty, your wealth, and the independence of your character, you are a power in the land. Neither the Pope nor the Czar are autocrats that can bear comparison with a

queen of the London world; and you can, to some extent, pass a sentence of ostracism."

"My dear Carrie, I never heard you so bitter before. What can have occurred to steep your soul in gall in this wise? Mr. Hainton has never done anything to awaken your wrath that I know of."

"We base our likes and our dislikes upon very slight foundation, as you know," retorted Miss Mangerston. "I have my own opinion of Mr. Hainton, and, in the interests of my sex, trust to see him receive a sharp lesson ere long."

"What do you mean?" cried Miss Clothele.

"I hope to see him made a fool of by a woman, instead of his making fools of them. Had I half your advantages, I'd revenge my sex on him before many weeks were over."

"I can neither agree with you nor quite understand you," replied Ethel, quietly. "I think you are mistaken in your view of Mr. Hainton's character, and I fancy Maude Riversley would consider you in error regarding his attentions to herself."

"Ah, has she told you so?"

"Not at all. We have never discussed the matter; but, like you, my dear, I can see, and I'll admit putting a very different interpretation on Mr. Hainton's attentions to yours. I deem him in veritable earnest."

"You do. Suppose I called upon you to test them. No, no, don't mind my idle words—I am talking nonsense. But you do like Maude Riversley, don't you?"

"Yes, certainly. I have not known her very long, but I hope I may reckon her now as one of my intimate friends."

There was a slight contraction of Miss

Mangerston's brow, a slight twitch of her mouth as she listened to these words. One might almost have said a slight shiver ran through her whole frame at Ethel's speech. When we recollect the fierce jealous attachment she had for Miss Clothele, it is easy to understand the gall and wormwood this observation was to her. It confirmed her still more in the wild scheme of vengeance floating vaguely through her mind—namely, the effecting of a rupture between John Hainton and Maude Riversley by means of Ethel. She had brooded much over this, and determined that it must be brought about. How, she did not as yet quite know, but that, if satisfactorily brought to pass, the results must be inevitably what she chiefly desired, seemed certain. Vengeance on John Hainton for that slight sin of forgetfulness last year, vengeance, too, on a girl she

detested. But far more important still, let the severance between Hainton and Maude be brought about through Ethel's interference, and all intimacy between the two girls was at end also, if she knew anything of the ways of women. Keep a girl really in love from the perpetration of any matrimonial folly, and, whatever her lips may express at the time, do not rely on either gratitude or friendship in the future. The converse is curious. Assist a woman to a husband, and, however bad an egg he may turn out, she will always have a kindly feeling for you. Miss Mangerston has, as yet, by no means made up her mind how all this is to be brought about, but she shows already much capability for such machination. Iago was a poisoner on homœopathic principles, and administered his jealousy-globules by slow degrees. Thoroughly

awake to this is Caroline Mangerston, and, though with as yet but a vague notion of how her slow poisoning is to be compassed, she has already whispered as much as she dares into Ethel's ear.

Drop a thing persistently and daily into a man's mind from which you derive no visible advantage, and it is very curious how, supposing him to be of only ordinary calibre, it will penetrate his system. Half-a-dozen doses of nitrate of silver have no visible effect on the patient; persisted in, this medicine makes him turn blue. It took a course of mental poisoning, it may be remembered, before Othello was reduced to a positive green.

Still, all this time the news of Fred Riversley's return has not reached Clumber-shire. It is known neither at Clumford Rectory nor by Miss Clothele, albeit she

has a somewhat extensive London correspondence. But, one morning, John Hainton turns up at the Rectory just in time for luncheon; and, that meal satisfactorily disposed of, manages to secure a *tête-à-tête* with Maude in the garden. He knows well how Arthur has built up castles in the air that will never now be realized; and he knows, further, that, with the exception of the girl by his side, the whole family have believed, more or less, in those castles. He has come over to dissolve that dream. He thinks it better that he should break it to them than they should hear it by accident, as they infallibly will before many days are over—likely to be in any paper they take up now.

“Miss Riversley,” he said, as he and Maude strolled leisurely down the garden walks, on which the leaves came fluttering

stealthily down, as if ashamed of succumbing to that crackle of frost, now becoming characteristic of daybreak. "I have got something to say to you."

Maude's heart gave a great jump, and I think an imploring "Oh, don't," trembled on her lips. She thought John Hainton was going to call upon her for a decision on a subject on which her mind was as yet by no means made up. Not that she was that sort of girl who could not give a man a straight honest answer to a question of this kind, but Maude had not as yet resolved what the answer should be. She did most decidedly wish that John Hainton should not ask her to be his wife at this present—and yet, such is the inconsistency of women on these matters, she could not help feeling a little nettled when he continued,—

“Have you heard that Fred Riversley has arrived in London? I had a letter from Town this morning, that tells me it is the talk of all the clubs.”

“And, perhaps, not a whit the truer for being a *canard* of the smoking-rooms,” replied Miss Riversley, with some slight asperity.

Hainton looked at her with some little astonishment—how is it possible for a man to follow the workings of a woman’s mind—how could he surmise that her heart was in a flutter lest he should ask her to be his wife—a question which he lacked courage to put to the test, although he had quite made up his mind that it had to be asked ere long.

“I don’t think you quite understand me,” he resumed, quietly; “this is no rumour, but a fact. Fred Riversley is in England

this minute, and has been recognized by Lord Lithfield ; and he, I believe, knew him well before his exile."

Her momentary pique was over now, and she recognized how bitter this shattering of his expectations would be to Arthur—disappointment, no doubt, to her parents ; but to her brother she knew it would mean not only disappointment, but, probably, difficulties. She had but a moiety of her brother's confidence, but she could guess the rest, and had little doubt, that he had lived of late a good deal on his expectations. She knew that Arthur had University creditors, who were somewhat importunate, before the shadowy inheritance of the Latimer estates had dangled before his eyes. She felt assured that such liabilities had been gathering apace of late.

" You have no doubt about this ? " she

said, at last. "You feel sure it is not mere rumour ; but absolute fact ?"

"Absolute fact," he replied, slowly.

"It is very hard on Arthur. That miserable will has wrought his ruin."

"How so, Miss Riversley ?"

"Oh, can you not see ? Speculating on that visionary inheritance, he ceased working, and took to spending. He has done no good whatever in his profession, and I have no doubt"—and here Miss Riversley stopped abruptly.

"No doubt of what ?" inquired Hainton.

"Of what ! Well, it is a thing I have no business to mention to you, or anyone. Please don't ask me, and forget such an expression escaped me."

"I don't wish to intrude upon your confidence, but if you think I can ever be of

help, I shali feel only too glad to do your bidding."

She thanked him with a smile, and felt assured that he meant it; but she knew full well that the assistance her brother would probably require, would be money, and that, of course, she could not ask from John Hainton, nor, indeed, anyone else that she knew of. Curious, she had never felt ill at ease with her companion before, and yet now, it was with undoubted embarrassment she asked,—

"Had he seen anything of Miss Clothele since her arrival in Clumbershire?"

Of course, if anything should have given John Hainton confidence, it was his fair companion's evident nervousness—on the contrary, he caught the infection, and, while thinking that he had never seen Maude look so lovely as she did in her plain muslin dress,

with the September sun gilding her bonny brown tresses, instead of asking for the prize on which his heart was set, he faltered forth, "That he had not been over to the Featheringhams as yet." How differently we should play the hand, if it could be played over again—how differently conduct many a conversation or episode in our lives ; but a good deal of life, like one's play at the whist-table, affords scant time for reflection—relentless partners or adversaries demand that we shall play—we do, and the wrong card continually.

They paced the walk for a turn or so in silence, and, at last, Maude suggested they should go in. She felt the situation was growing awkward, and women dislike and instinctively put an end to such circumstance, as a rule. Her cavalier mutely assented, remarking, as they turned towards

the house, "I met a friend of yours, by the way, who is staying with the Featheringhams, shooting, last week — Colonel Leslie."

"Indeed ; I am glad that he is down in this neighbourhood. He is an immense favourite of mine. I look upon him with reverence, mixed with incredulity. It seems so hard to reconcile the quiet courteous colonel, with the most terrible *sabreur* on the Indian frontier ; and yet I am told it was so, by those who knew ; and that Ralph Leslie was the most daring, tireless cavalry leader we had when the border was ablaze in the North-west ; and I believe the border is pretty generally in that state out there—much like our own marches were here before the union with Scotland. I always regard Colonel Leslie as a 'belted Will'—the famous Lord Howard, that lived

on the border, that figures in Scott's 'Lay of the Last Minstrel.'"

If there had been one thing wanting to complete John Hainton's discomfort, it was this. He had felt jealous of Colonel Leslie's intimacy with Maude, in London, and this rather inflated speech of hers fanned the dying embers with a vengeance. Miss Riversley had no need to apprehend a crisis that afternoon, and she and the Squire of Enderly parted in friendly, but ordinary fashion.

CHAPTER III.

“THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL.”

HOPE deferred may make the heart sick, but hope deferred, unexpectedly realized, is wont to produce a species of moral intoxication. Fred Riversley had not communicated with his father until after that final interview with Mr. Prossiter, at which he had been recognized by Lord Lithfield. Then he wrote to Sir John and informed him he should be at Bunnington in a few hours, in short, as soon as he could complete the necessary steps for entering upon his inheritance. It was long since Sir John had been so roused about anything. It was his custom now to croak away his days

over the fire and the papers, or, in the early autumn-time, to sit at the open window of his study, which looked over the broken park-land. Somewhat querulous and sarcastic he was to those about him, as might be looked for in one, bankrupt in health and wealth, and whose best hope in life could only be, that the hour-glass was turned for the last time. We are most of us loth to hear that our hours are numbered, and cling to this world, little pleasure as there may appear left for us in it. We fear to embark upon the unknown, even when the sleep that knows no waking, should look like rest from fighting the stormy billows that surround us.

To Sir John, the news that his son was alive and once more in England, acted like a draft of the elixir of life. He had once more something to live for—to see Fred,

and to see Fred, with the assistance of his newly-acquired property, redeem the Bunnington lands from the fierce grasp of the usurers was, he felt, worth living for ; otherwise, he had been of late, like many another old Pagan of his own stamp, half wishing that the boredom of existence might cease for him. When age and ill-health debar such men indulgence in their former pleasures, life seems for them to have lost its savour.

Sir John fretted and fidgeted after the fashion of a querulous invalid, whose whole interest was thoroughly absorbed in one object. He was in a fever about the post, quite an hour before it was due ; he apparently expected supplementary posts at unrecognized periods, while the grooms became veritable couriers, and the contents of the stables posters, so continually were they

despatched in wild search of problematical telegrams. The world of the confirmed invalid is so circumscribed that it is little wonder an object of interest is apt to absorb his entire faculties. The old man thinks of nothing else ; Bunnington Park and the Bunnington acres are, after all, not to pass away from his line, nor the Riversleys to be erased from the roll of country gentlemen in Hertfordshire. Aye, Fred will serve his time as sheriff, after all, and if he will only marry judiciously, which means a girl with money, might hunt the country again in days to come. He's old enough to prefer solids to sweets ; shares, securities, and the three per cents. to a pretty face ; and as for a fashionable beauty, who owes her tresses and complexion to her coiffeur, and her figure to her dressmaker, he must surely be case-hardened against their toils. Let me see, Fred's thirty-four, and has

bought his experiences, pretty dearly too, poor boy, these latter years, I am afraid. However, he's come round at last, and landed the big stake, for which I made so many fatal essays, as Newmarket and Homburg can testify.

Forty-eight hours of feverish impatience, and the welcome yellow tissue, having, it is needless to say, eluded the vigilance of the groom on vedette duty, is put into the Baronet's hands; they shake a little as he opens it, and reads that Fred will be with him to dinner. A worldly, though thoroughly good-natured, father he has been hitherto, never able to do much for his son, owing to the hot revels he had held in his wild youth, but he would have shared the property honestly with his heir had he not unluckily gone through it before Fred had left Eton. It was not until his infirmities left him, but

the retrospect of life, that he felt twinges of remorse at having laid low the family *tree*, and improved the Riversleys off the roll of English landed gentry. How Sir John fussed about for the next few hours let his servitors testify. He hobbled across to his son's room—it was the one he had occupied from a boy—to see that everything was prepared half-a-dozen times, and again, and again, was the housekeeper summoned and cross-examined in minor details. Mrs. Broadsley had witnessed the Captain's coming of age, and, like all the old servants who had previously known him, was somewhat excited herself about the return of the prodigal. He had been freehanded, as most such spendthrifts are, but he had ever besides a bright smile and cheering word for those who waited on him. That Master Fred should be popular in the stables was but

natural. He could cross a country or make anything in reason travel in harness. That he should be popular with the female domestics was also natural: a good-looking fellow, with a jest, if not something more, always ready on his lips, was certain of their sympathies; even the old keeper began to call to mind, and chuckle over, some of Master Fred's feats with the breech-loader. In short, Sir John and all his retainers were with ear a-prick for the wheels of the absentee's chariot.

The Baronet had always been fond of his boy: he had laughed at his youthful conceits and extravagances; but it was not till poor Fred was dipped past redemption that his father had really instructed him in the mere hollowness of their holding. It was not till he appealed to him for help that Sir John sadly explained that Bunnington was really

no longer theirs. He had been told to look for no further help beyond his allowance when he joined the Guards ; but so had most of his comrades, and the major part of them practically tested how far that warning was true before two or three years had rolled over their heads. Fred Riversley had seen it turn out so often a monition without consequences ; a barometer, the indications of which were quite unreliable ; on which stormy merely meant breezy weather, that it was little wonder he deemed the Bunnington glass set in similar fashion. He knew his father had lived a very fast life in his day, and was not logician enough to understand that, from the premises of a spendthrift sire and unentailed estate, the deduction was unmistakable pauperism for the next in succession. I don't know, with his bringing up, that this knowledge would have made much

difference; to Fred Riversley, launched upon town in the way he was, probably not, but still he did not know it till the crash had come. Let this fact stand recorded in favour of a man of whom there is little to put upon the credit side of his ledger, and give him the benefit of believing that, knowing the truth, he would have set his shoulder to the wheel, and worked hard in some shape for the redemption of the family home and acres. He has come by the scratch of a pen into a fortune which, strive as he might, it is little likely he would have made in these few years; we shall see now what he proposes to do with it.

The gates are wide open, and the lodge-keeper and his wife all agape at the Park entrance as the carriage wheels in, and a dark care-worn face carelessly acknowledges the

beaming smiles and salutations of the worthy couple.

“The troubles and the furrin parts have spoilt him,” said the woman, as she turned disappointed to her husband. “He never passed the gates on coming home without a smile and a joke for Peggy.”

“The sunshine’s all out of his face,” returned her husband, “and his eyes dreadful. He aint himself, old lady, or he’d never have forgot to ask me whether I’d got over the taking of the wasp nest. But Bunnington ’ll bring him round, no fear.”

If there had been excitement at the lodge, you may depend upon it there was still more at the house. Not a retainer of the establishment but contrived to be in the way under some pretext or another : the old servants to welcome their young master back, the new to see this gay soldier of whom they had


heard so much. The last enlisted housemaid, in the smartest ribbons she thought Mrs. Broadsley would tolerate, was peeping over the bannisters as breathless with expectation as the old keeper who lounges prominently before the shrubbery in hope of recognition.

A chill ran through the whole of these good people as Fred Riversley passed with impassive face through their midst to his father's room ; to the housekeeper only did he vouch recognition, he shook hands with her, briefly complimented her on wearing well, and passed the remainder without notice. As Mrs. Broadsley confidentially told the butler at her own table, that evening—he was a new official since the Captain's exodus : “ Not the Mister Fred we sent abroad, Mr. Tunbottle. No, no ! He would have had his joke. ‘ Growing younger and younger, Mrs. Broadsley, you'll get back to your cradle

before I get to my coffin, I'll go bail.' He'd always something saucy to say to me."


Poor old Sir John met his son in the doorway, and the first sign of emotion that escaped Fred Riversley was visible then. Broken, cynical bandit as he now was, unmoved as he had returned the greetings of all the old servitors who remembered him from boyhood, he was touched at the change these eight years had wrought in his father. He had left him a hale, elderly gentleman, taking his shooting and hunting easily, cursing the gout, and grumbling that doctors restricted him at times somewhat in the matter of claret, but still enjoying the society of his neighbours and friends. He met him now a broken-down, decrepit, old man, trembling between gout and paralysis, and, though he had this as yet to learn, a recluse.

In their own worldly fashion these two had



loved each other well. Fred Riversley had often felt proud as some bygone story of his father's reckless escapades had come to his ears in the beginning of his London career. It may not be right in the eyes of the moralist, but it happens to be nature, a force that so constantly upsets the views and designs of her reformers, that men will take a certain pride in being connected with those who have made the town ring with their folly and excesses ; while, on the other hand, that their progenitors should chuckle and mutter, "a chip of the old block, sir," over the delinquencies of their children is an equally common case. Sinners turn saints at times, and exact puritanical views and conduct from their descendants, it is true, but the result is usually not attended with much success.

The close grip of the hand, and the some-



what guttural, "How are you?" with which we meet, according to our insular custom, after many years' separation, and the pair sat down. Poor old Sir John, he quite shook with excitement; he would have felt somewhat ashamed of himself some ten years ago; it was as contrary to the canons of his world to betray emotion, as it is amongst the Turks, or the Indians of the American prairie; but he is old and feeble now, and no longer equal to controlling his feelings.

"My coming home is a little too much for you, father; let me ring the bell, a glass of wine will do you good."

"Yes, Fred, I am weak, you know; very stupid of me, but I am, and then, boy, it is so long since I saw you; but it must be brandy, Fred. Alas! my wine-bibbing days are over: brandy-and-water is all the doctors allow me, now."

That the bell was attended to with marvellous celerity need scarcely be said. A household all agog with curiosity, was it likely a chance of gratifying that thirst by even momentarily gaping at the returned hero, would be missed? No, nothing but the strict etiquette of a well-ordered household prevented quite a skirmish anent whose privilege it might be to answer that summons. It was quashed peremptorily by the announcement that Mr. Tunbottle meant to waive his rank for once, and condescend to see "what was up" himself.

Mr. Tunbottle entered the room with the intention of making a little speech, if opportunity served, about how delighted the whole household were at Captain Riversley's return, and then diverging into as much irrelevant gossip as might seem possible. That dignified servitor's benignant smile was not a

little disturbed by the curt answer to his bland—"Did you ring, sir?"

"Of course I did, and dev'lish slow you've been about attending to it. Get some brandy-and-water—you know what my father usually takes—and look sharp about it. I want a glass of the old brown sherry for myself afterwards, but be quick with the brandy, d'ye hear?"

"Yes, sir," replied the disconcerted butler. And it may be safely said that Mr. Tunbottle, to speak figuratively, retired to his own domain with the starch more completely taken out of him than had been his fate since assuming office at Bunnington. Butler to a broken, careless man, like Sir John, was, as may be imagined, a lucrative sinecure; the wine in the housekeeper's room was celebrated through all flunkeydom in the county.

But Mr. Tunbottle was much too good a judge to thwart the heir apparent until he had fully considered the case, so that he reappeared with the required refreshment in a very few minutes, and performed his duties in strictest silence. He relieved his feelings in the housekeeper's room later on, by observing,

“No, Mrs. Broadsley, I'm disapinted, he aint the fine open-hearted young gentleman I've been given to expect ; older, ma'am, than I thought to see, and not free from a vice of old age—suspicion. Then his manners, ma'am, are not what *we* are accustomed to. I can make allowances for the wretched society he's lived along with of late years, and he needs it, I assure you. Why, he spoke to *me*, who have always associated with the aristocracy, as if he was a millowner, and I a factory hand.”

In short, there was disappointment generally through the Bunnington household about the manner in which the restored prince had responded to the greetings of his adherents. No descendant of the Stuarts could have displayed more splendid oblivion of past services than Fred Riversley ; except Mrs. Broadsley, he had not deigned to take the slightest notice of any one of the old servants. He had no word for the old keeper, or the old tenants, and seemed perfectly indifferent to the shooting prospects, about which, in days of old, he'd even been keenly interested.

When old Breakham, the head-keeper, came up officially, the morning after the Captain's return, and sent in word by Mr. Tunbottle, that he'd like to see Mr. Frederick for a few minutes, the butler came back with an intimation that Mr. Frederick

was busy now, but would see him before the 1st.

"He just smokes cigarettes and reads those yellow French books all day, that's what he does, sir," observed Mr. Tunbottle, in friendly comment.

"And if I might be permitted to permeate an opinion (a little given to fine, though not appropriate, language) Mr. Tunbottle, I should say the Captain was bored."

"Yes, Mr. Breakham, he's bored, and don't mean a stay."

To poor Sir John, his son's visit brought bitter disappointment; the frank, reckless young fellow who had gone such a hopeless smash, and then fled to the Continent, had never returned; this cool, cynical, sharp-tongued man-of-the-world bore no resemblance to the bright boy he had lost. Fred Riversley was respectful and attentive to

him, but there was no ring in it all—no warmth in his conversation—while his obvious indifference when the Baronet commenced harping on his pet string, the involvements of Bunnington, troubled Sir John sorely.

It was the third evening after his arrival, as Fred and his father sat over their wine after dinner, that the Baronet opened his heart.

“I think you’d best begin with that mortgage of Gaper’s, Fred ; we pay five per cent. on that, and that’s stiff interest, as things go. It’ll take you some years’ careful management to redeem the old place ; but thank God, you’ve come back, and with the means to do it. I little thought poor George Latimer would ever do us such a turn ; but I shall die now with the satisfaction of knowing that I leave a Riversley behind

me at Bunnington ; and, Fred, you've sown your wild oats, now. You've not made such a fool of yourself as your father did, eh ?" and the old man looked nervously across to his son.

"No," rejoined that gentleman, slowly. "Seven years' penal servitude don't reform wrongdoers sometimes. I'll tell you why, in the main, because they don't get a fresh start in life. I've had better luck. I've served my time, gained my experiences, and am in a far better position than I ever was before. No, you needn't be afraid of my making a fool of myself again."

"And when shall you set about clearing the estate, Fred ?"

"My dear father, I don't want to extinguish your hopes, but my own opinion is, that the estate is dipped past redemption. I have waded through some of those papers you

have called my attention to since my return, and I have come to that conclusion. Now, I tell you fairly, I'm not going to jeopardize the comfortable income I have inherited by attempting the impossible."

"But, Fred, you would never let the old place go! With all the money you have come into, you could surely make some sort of terms. Think of the Riversleys blotted out from the landed gentry of Hertfordshire, think of Bunnington in the hands of some d——d City fellow."

"I don't want to hurt your feelings, father, but I tell you, fairly, I'm not going to sacrifice my present position for any sentiment about the old family place. I've had the sentiment knocked pretty well out of me of late. It would take pretty well double my inheritance to clear Bunnington, and I'd rather stand clear with the world,

as I do now, than be lord here, still heavily mortgaged."

"Fred! Fred! You can't mean it; say you don't mean it," rejoined the old man, hoarsely.

"But I do mean it. Bunnington must go to the hammer at your death. You can't accuse me of having much hand in it. You and my grandfather left me little chance. You had disposed of pretty well everything before I was of age; and as long as I don't complain, I can't see you have any cause to."

It was true, terribly true, and passing over the sentiment for the old home, Fred was no doubt wise in his decision, but he might have broken it to his father less cynically.

The old man gave a slight shiver, and looked at him, almost imploringly.

"No," continued Fred, "you've had the spending of Bunnington, and have no cause

for complaint because I don't want to buy the property now it's in the market. A country seat, to my mind, is a confounded nuisance, entailing all sorts of expenses and disagreeable ties. If you want to shoot, hire a moor—if to hunt, take a hunting-box ; but the sole permanent home for a man of the world is a house in London. No, let Bunnington go ; whoever buys it will get very indifferent interest for his money."

He was ill, ruined, and feeble now, but this last sneer at the family seat, made the old *roué* pull himself together. He drew himself up, and it was with all the hauteur of early days that the Baronet replied :

"Latimer made one slight oversight in his will. It was a pity he did not insist upon a change of name as a condition of your inheritance. You're right, I don't think Bunnington Park would suit you."

Sir John met his son next morning, with the most stately politeness, and this frigid courtesy continued between the pair during the day. Fred made no sort of effort to pacify his father's obvious indignation, but quietly announced his return to town, a thing duly carried into execution the succeeding morning. The Baronet made no effort to detain him, but Mr. Tunbottle gave it as his opinion, in the housekeeper's room that evening, "the Captain had squeezed the life pretty well out of him."

"I don't know what the row was, ma'am, but Sir John, who was in such a twitter to see Mr. Fred, don't look like wanting to see him again. The news of his son's coming back made him reg'lar flicker up, but he looks like following materially after the order of flickers, and going out pretty shortly. It's a fact, Mrs. Broadsley; just judge for

yourself to-morrow, ma'am. He's had a shock, and he ain't equal to shocks. No, shocks late in life is dangerous ;" and Mr. Tunbottle waggled his head with much sagacity.

CHAPTER IV.

ARTHUR'S DREAM DISPELLED.

ARTHUR RIVERSLEY, returning from a pleasant lawn-tennis party, held at the barracks, in Clumford, entered the rectory in the highest of spirits, and the neatest suit of flannels yet seen in those parts. In the hall he ran across his sister Maude, on her way upstairs to dress for dinner.

"Pity you couldn't come with me," he exclaimed. "It was a capital party; very well done, and you would have enjoyed it."

"No doubt; but I have something to say to you, Arthur. John Hainton has been here to-day."

"Well, I've no doubt you've passed a

pleasant afternoon ; and, am I to go further, and offer congratulations, Maude ? ” said the young man, laughing.

“ Don’t be absurd,” she replied, tartly ; some recollection of those unspoken, though expected, words, flashing across her memory. “ He brought some news. Bad, very bad ; but important for you to know.”

The colour died out of Arthur Riversley’s cheeks, as he muttered, “ it was no news of Fred, was it ? ”

“ Yes,” said Maude, gently. “ Fred is not only in London, but has been recognised by Lord Lithfield, and one or two more. From what Mr. Hainton told me, there is no doubt about its being Fred, in genuine earnest.”

“ It’s hard, deuced hard, upon me,” said Arthur, hoarsely. “ He had no business to make a mystery of his whereabouts, pretend

to be dead, and raise up false expectations in others. I think he has behaved infamously—with no consideration for his father, or any of his relations.”

“Hush, hush,” said Maude. “I was afraid it would be hard upon you, in many ways. I am afraid you have built too much upon this inheritance, and neither worked so hard nor been so prudent as you ought.”

“It is no use talking about that now,” he rejoined, irritably. “I feel no doubt about my relations recalling to my mind that I’ve spilt the milk. One’s friends and family never neglect expatiating on the mess we’ve made of it.”

“I didn’t mean to annoy you, Arthur ; but was it not better you should learn this from my lips, sooner than those of a stranger ?” she rejoined, softly.

“Yes. I’m put rather in a hole, and can’t help being upset about it. You’re a good little girl, I believe. Don’t bother me any more about it, now. Let the others know—if they don’t already—and make Bessie understand this is no subject for her flippancy.”

And then Arthur Riversley dashed upstairs, to hide the bitterness of his disappointment from all eyes.

He threw himself into an easy-chair, and began to muse over this complete upset of all his dreams and calculations. That airy Spanish castle he had conjured up so persistently, laid levelled to its filmy foundations. Fred home again! What was Latimer’s will to him now? What chance had he of ever inheriting the baronetcy? An event postponed to the Greek Kalends that; and then he began gravely to speculate

on the desperate change this made in his prospects. Arthur Riversley, a struggling barrister, with no inclination to work, living on a limited allowance, vouchsafed him by his father, was a very different man from Arthur Riversley, heir to five thousand a year, and a baronetcy. Then he looked ruefully back over what this year had done for him. He hardly liked to think much about that. To have imbibed a taste for extravagance, a distaste for work, and to have accumulated a tolerable incubus of debt, was not a healthy start in a legal career. And yet Arthur dimly recognised all this.

He was one of those weak, but imaginative natures, that suffer agonies of remorse in their hours of tribulation—who see more clearly than their sternest mentor can point out, the madness, the folly of their conduct; but who are perfectly incapable of

stemming the tide. They drift, as a rule, slowly but steadily into unknown waters, and never reach either bank or harbour of refuge. Miserables, too, who hardly enjoy their short butterfly career, ever conscience-stricken, ever oppressed with the knowledge that they are sipping unprofitable sweets instead of gathering honey. *Væ victis!* for the fate of these unfortunates is sad to reflect upon.

Arthur dressed gloomily for dinner that evening. There was no immediate unpleasantness to be apprehended, but he felt there were breakers a-head, and that the ensuing year would be fraught with trouble and annoyances. Dinner was not an inspiriting entertainment—evident, very, that all the family were quite aware of his dethronement. Sympathy on the part of the ladies; a curious but latent disposition on

the part of the Rector to view him in the light of an impostor ; and, truth to tell, the Rev. Mortimer was very sore at the news John Hainton had brought ; while even the servants, at least so Arthur thought in his morbid state of mind, were watching, with keen enjoyment, how the deposed Prince carried himself. It is so with the majority of us ; we lower our crests and show ruin in our faces, when it comes to us, instead of striving to emulate the jaunty few, who meet the crash with a smile on their lips and a flower in their buttonhole. The evidence does not matter a tittle. When a man meets his fate in the latter fashion, the world never will believe his difficulties are more than temporary. Clothe yourself in sackcloth and ashes, and they are prepared to believe, not only that you have lost all your money, but that you have added

larceny, arson, and murder, to the sum of your iniquities.

Arthur had no heart for a *tête-à-tête* with his father after dinner, and, under the plea of headache, made his escape from the dining-room on the heels of the ladies. He went out upon the terrace, and, lighting a cigar, began to pace moodily up and down, and meditate upon his future prospects. He had not been there long before Maude glided to his side.

"Don't be angry with me, Arthur," she pleaded; "but I want to comfort you, if I may. We all recognise how severe a disappointment this must be to you. It is that to papa and mamma; but of course it presses harder upon you than any one."

"Naturally it does. It is I who have to bear the consequences. You must own it is rough upon a fellow, Maude, who has been

brought up as heir to a goodish property, to suddenly find himself a pauper."


She took no notice of the wretched sophistry. She knew he was in difficulties before he left Oxford, or even dreamt of inheriting the Latimer estates, and she made little doubt that he had considerably increased his liabilities during the last year.

"I am sorry, so sorry for you. Is it very bad, Arthur?"

"What do you mean by *it*?" he asked, sharply.

"Don't be angry; but you told me you were in debt some time since. I suppose it is worse now?"

"Naturally. I've not been so bad as most fellows, who would have raised a lot of money on their prospects; but a man with good expectations isn't called upon to be so careful as a man who has none."



She thought of the day when she had first heard of it, and told him it was a "will-o'-the-wisp" inheritance; but all she said was, "Are things very pressing?"

"No; not likely to be for some months," he replied.

"And what will you do, then?"

"I've not thought, as yet; but surely Fred will be bound to do something. He ought to feel how bitter the disappointment is for me."

"Arthur, have you lost your head? how can you urge it in that light? You seem to expect that Fred will repent that he is not dead and you reigning in his stead."

"Pooh!" he rejoined, testily, "I don't mean that, of course; but he must see it is hard upon me."

"Oh! Arthur, dear," said Maude, vehemently; "don't build upon that. What-

ever your scrape is, look it fairly in the face. Papa may scold, but he will see you through it. Make a clean breast to him when the time comes. It won't be pleasant, I know—such confessions never are; but it will be surely as easy as asking a cousin you hardly know, to pay your debts."

"But I have a claim upon him," rejoined her brother, doggedly.

"What? what? Simply that for twelve months you believed him to be dead, and thought you might succeed to his inheritance. How could you ever advance anything so preposterous? The mention of such a claim would be simply to invite cynical or angry rejoinder."

"If you will persist in putting things in that coarse fashion, it is useless to argue," returned Arthur, sulkily.

"Call it coarse, if you like, but I want

you to see things as they are," said Maude. "Fred has the character of being free-hearted and generous ; it is possible he might volunteer to do something for you ; but to ask him, remember, is to humiliate yourself."

"Women never understand these things ; and perhaps, Maude, you will abstain from volunteering your advice in future."

It was useless to say more, so she left him to his reflections.

He walked up and down smoking and still musing on the alteration in his position. He was just about starting on a round of country visits. How would they treat him at Barnsborow Castle ? What welcome would Miss Clothele, Lord Lithfield, and all that set accord him ? Would Lady Featheringham drop him or not ? These, and a lot of similar petty social questions, occupied

his mind even now much more than the fact that he was, to speak metaphorically, with his back to the wall, and no way out of that position save by fighting the battle of life in real earnest. Not the stuff this of which gladiators are made. The men who do battle with the world are made of more granite-like material.

The idea may perhaps be deemed preposterous that Arthur Riversley and his relations should have, for the most part, so blindly worked themselves into the belief of Fred Riversley's death. My experience teaches me otherwise. There is nothing people are so credulous about as the inheritance of property. Tell them it is left to them under certain contingencies, and they immediately ignore the contingencies, while they will build up expectations upon the most shadowy grounds. Hazlitt tells an

amusing story in his "Table Talk" *à propos* to this. A man, so notorious for his romancing tendencies that nobody ever dreamed of giving him credence in life, died and left a will bequeathing jewelry, stocks, shares, and cash in the bank amongst his numerous friends and relations. These people were utterly incredulous that his last will and testament would prove in beautiful accordance with the tenour of his life, and the property enumerated be utterly fabulous. No getting those legatees to believe for some time that these stocks, shares, &c., were the last outcome of a magnificent imagination which had failed to adopt novel writing as a safety-valve.

There were not at this time of year, as may be supposed, many of his intimates or even of his acquaintances left in town. Still, to the few there were, Fred Riversley

was a ~~ridic~~ hard to understand. They were prepared to welcome him back open-handed, but he did not respond at all in similar fashion. He accepted invitations to dinner, made his way as far as possible at present into his old haunts; but the remark, "By Jove, Riversley is a deuced different fellow from what he was!" is ever on men's lips. The gay, reckless, light-hearted Guardsman is a shrewd, cynical, reticent man of the world now, willing to receive hospitality apparently, but much more chary of dinner-giving now that he is a man of property than when he was a broken spend-thrift overburdened with debt. His settlement with his old creditors—more especially the money-lenders—was marked by an astuteness that made even his old confederate, and now established confidential manager, Solano stare. Hard, indeed, were the terms

he dictated to the children of Israel. They got their money back, of course, but it was accompanied with interest calculated at moderate rate, and bearing no compound complications. They grumbled, but they took it, preferring a compromise to the expense and uncertainty of resorting to the law for assistance. Courts of Justice have never been inclined to favour the usurer from Shylock's time even unto our own.

But, if there was one man who viewed Captain Riversley's proceedings with unmitigated astonishment, it was Mr. Prossiter. That gentleman had naturally seen and heard a good deal of George Latimer's heir in putting him into possession of his inheritance. He was much surprised to find the reckless spendthrift had developed into an astute and hard-headed man of business ; still he rather, as one may suppose, admired

the Captain in this unsuspected capacity. What Mr. Prossiter could not get over was, that Fred Riversley should have retained Solano as his right-hand man. It was Solano who bought wines and horses for him, and evidently chiefly managed his affairs.

“Why?” asked Mr. Prossiter of himself, tapping his teeth with his eye-glasses. “He knows that man to be an out-and-out scoundrel. Solano’s attempt to personate him would alone prove that, but Sir Frederick was evidently quite aware of it before. I suppose he’s useful to him in some of his betting transactions, for I’ve a suspicion he is dabbling on the Turf again. I can only say, if he shows half the astuteness there he has displayed in business details here, the book-makers will find his money a good deal harder to come by than it was in days of

yore. Solano, however, is a mystery. He ought to be doing penal servitude, and is apparently the bosom friend of the prosecutor that should have been. I have heard of transforming a confirmed poacher into a gamekeeper, but I never heard of a banker who had ventured on the bold experiment of appointing a practised burglar his cashier."

CHAPTER V.

AT BARNSBOROW CASTLE.

A VERY few days after John Hainton's communication saw Maude and her brother on their way to Barnsborow Castle. Arthur knew he would there meet Miss Clothele and divers London people, and had little doubt of their being quite aware that his cousin had reappeared and claimed his inheritance.

"It is well to have the thing settled at once, Maude, and so I don't mind being your escort ; but I daresay a good many of our London friends will next door to cut me now."

"You will find yourself quite wrong. They

will receive you exactly the same as ever. Forgive me, my brother, but you always attached a great deal more importance to that shadowy contingency than other people did. It perhaps gave you some slight start in society, but I fancy Ethel Clothele did a good deal more for you."

"Why?" rejoined her brother. "I'm sure you told me plainly enough in town——"

"Hush, and don't run away with nonsensical ideas. I only mean that Ethel is a power in the London world, and exercised her power with great kindness in behalf of her friend and her friend's brother."

Arthur Riversley relapsed into silence. This was looking at things in a light from which he had never regarded them, and it would have roused considerable indignation

on his part had not his *Château d'Espagne* been already crumbled in the dust.

Maude proved perfectly right in her anticipations. Irritable and jealously alive to a slight as Arthur Riversley was, even he was constrained to allow that nothing could be more cordial than his welcome from every one assembled at Barnsborow Castle. Colonel Leslie, notwithstanding he had never been particularly cordial, now gave him a hearty hand grip. The Colonel might not be possessed of the wisdom of cities, but he was a monstrous keen judge of what he designated "a man." I don't think he would have quite placed Arthur Riversley in that category, for he had read him pretty correctly, but he felt that this must be a sore disappointment to him, and wondered whether he would now buckle to, face life as a problem which he had to solve by hard

work, and show that he had stuff in him after all.

“You must let me carry off Maude!” exclaimed Ethel to her hostess, with a gay smile. “I assure you we shall neither of us be of any benefit to society till we have had an hour’s unrestrained gossip. You know young women’s weakness when they call themselves friends, so of course we have lots of secrets and scandal to exchange.”

“Go along with you,” cried her ladyship, laughing. “Ring for tea when you want it, Ethel, and only mind you get your malicious confidences satisfactorily concluded before dinner-time. I expect you to be your bonnie selves again by then, remember.”

Ethel gave her hostess a laughing nod, and then bore Maude off to her own room.

“Well,” she said, after seating her visitor

in a large arm-chair, "what news have you for me? When is it to be?"

"I don't understand you!" cried Maude, blushing in a manner that showed she did perfectly, nevertheless.

"Oh, yes you do, my dear," rejoined Ethel, laughing. "Has John Hainton disburthened his heart yet? When am I to buy you the prettiest bangle in all London? Speak, and don't keep fencing with my question, or pretending you do not understand me."

"I won't do that. But, Ethel, John Hainton is no more to me than any other man," and Maude's lips twitched, and the colour rather faded from her cheeks as she spoke.


Miss Clothele eyed her keenly for a moment, then, passing her arm round her, whispered—

"Forgive me ; I did not mean to pain you, but Mr. Hainton had given your friends good grounds to suppose that he intended to ask you a question which apparently he has not yet nerved himself to do. But I don't think, if you've any feeling for him, you need feel uneasy, Maude. He's coming to stay here this week, and I'll hold you a dozen pair of gloves you've had the refusal of Enderby Park before his visit's over."

"Don't tease, Ethel," was Maude's reply. "You've, of course, heard that my cousin Frederick has turned up?"

"Oh, yes ; Colonel Leslie brought the news down with him. It is very hard on your brother."

"It is, I admit, but it really ought not to be. Arthur knew what a shadowy chance his was from the outset, only unluckily



everybody bolstered him up in the delusion that he must inherit that property ; because Fred could not be found at once, they jumped at the conclusion that he could not be found at all. The bubble has burst at last, and Arthur naturally feels a little sore as he reflects upon his folly."

"I cannot call him so very foolish," replied Ethel, slowly. "I, like many others, certainly thought Captain Riversley would never be heard of again."

"But why should you all think so ? Fred disappeared because he was ruined ; to such a waif as he doubtless became, the news of his good fortune would come slowly. Still it was absurd to conclude he was not, because he was hard to find. Arthur, as I have already told you, will be the great sufferer, and verily Mr. Latimer has done him much evil. He has encouraged an indolent

young man in his indolence, and instilled into him that his bread was provided for him ready buttered ; the fact being, of course, that he has to earn his butter."

"I understand," replied Ethel, thoughtfully, "but surely there can be no great harm done ; it is, at all events, only a year thrown away."

Miss Riversley shook her head ; she knew her brother well, and felt that in his case a year's idleness would make work come very difficult to him.

When they descended to dinner, they found their hostess in no little perturbation. "I am so sorry," she exclaimed, "I have really got hardly enough cavaliers as it is for all you young ladies ; and here is a note just arrived from Mr. Hainton to say that unexpected business has suddenly called him abroad ; he consequently,

therefore, regrets, &c., that he cannot come to me."

"It is curious," said Miss Mangerston to Maude, who happened to be next her, "but 'important business' always *does* carry men off in other directions when they wish to evade an engagement."

"But why," said Ethel, who overheard her remark, "should you think that Mr. Hainton wishes to avoid a visit to Barnsborow Castle?"

Miss Mangerston merely shrugged her shoulders, and muttered something about men being extremely changeable. Her observation had been made with the amiable intention of conveying to Maude that John Hainton avoided Barnsborow from disinclination to meet her. Miss Mangerston was a good hater, and slight as was the cause of John Hainton's offending, had

never in the least agreed to condone that slip of memory at the Enderly dance. If she could traverse the path of his love affair, she determined to do so. She did not particularly like Maude—in fact, though careful not to show it, Miss Mangerston disliked all Ethel's friends ; if she could have had her own way, Miss Clothele would have had no other friend but herself.

After dinner, Arthur found himself seated next to Ralph Leslie. The Colonel alluded at once to the re-appearance of Fred Riversley. "It made quite a sensation," he observed, "in the London world ; he had been sought so long in vain, that I think we had all quite arrived at the conclusion that he would never be heard of again. From what Lithfield once told me, it makes a serious difference to your prospects."

"Yes," rejoined Arthur, curtly, "my in-

heritance disappears as if it had been invested in a bubble company."


The Colonel rather opened his eyes at this; it was difficult for the hard practical soldier to realize how completely Arthur Riversley had regarded himself as George Latimer's heir. The young man had even gone so far as to feel aggrieved that seven years had yet to elapse before he took possession of his property. But little more than twelve months ago he had hardly heard of George Latimer, and most assuredly that he could by any possibility be a penny the better or worse for his death, was a thing that had never occurred to him. He really did feel as if he had actually had and had now lost a largish property.

"Well," said the Colonel, "as it was not to come to you, it is well the golden bait was dangled before your eyes no longer.

Expectations are always bad things to rely upon, and yet there are very few of us can help doing so to some extent. The delusion in your case, as it was to be dispelled, is dispelled in good time ; you will have to throw yourself into the collar now, I presume."

"Yes," said Arthur, "I suppose I must dedicate my time and energies to 'Coke on Littleton.' The acquisition of law can only be described as a beastly 'grind.'"

"I daresay it is," observed the Colonel, laughing ; "but I fancy the rudiments of most trades don't interest us much in the acquirement. I can recollect a good many years ago, experiencing your sentiments with regard to the 'goose-step ;' but you have one pull over us, success in your profession means money, and we get high up the tree without gathering much of that."



In the drawing-room, meanwhile, quite an animated discussion was being carried on concerning Mr. Hainton's sudden departure. Her ladyship had seen him only two or three days before, and far from hinting at any such possibility, he had bidden her good-bye till dinner-time on this day. What could have called him so unexpectedly away? Mr. Hainton was not a man whose business ever called him much outside his own county. He took his three months in town every year, seeing the season conscientiously through, from Easter to Goodwood. He went away to divers houses in other counties to slay partridges and pheasants; or for country balls. But business calling him abroad was an incident that none of the fair commentators on his excuse could ever call to mind as having befallen him.

It may be absurd and unwarrantable, but

departure from our usual grooves is always viewed with surprise, much curiosity, and some slight suspicion by our intimates. If you could but try it, my friend, and listen to the comments of your habitual associates concerning you, I fancy you would admit the most right-minded amongst us would be taken aback. Our intimates can be at times, oh, so nice on these occasions.

“Gone abroad suddenly, dear me; who with?” “Sailed to America, has he? I always thought he could never last at the pace he was going; bad business, I suppose.” Such are the flying commentaries absence from our accustomed haunts is wont to evoke from those with whom we habitually live. Of course, I am not speaking of our domestic circle, or those in possession of our entire confidence; and yet even to them these sudden foreign excursions

sions are at times supplemented by startling revelations. Miss Mangerston saw her opportunity, and day by day she trickled her insinuations with consummate tact into the ears of the guests at Barnsborow. She showed a dexterity in so doing almost devilish, when we remember how exceeding slight had been the provocation she had received, and what constituted the extreme danger of her malicious accusations was their vagueness and variety. Much too clever to give any direct reason for John Hainton's mysterious disappearance, she hinted at a dozen. In the strictest confidence she confided to Colonel Leslie and others that she had heard it was the result of an unfortunate intimacy with a married lady at Brighton; to Lady Prosonbore she averred that Mr. Hainton had been involved in some unfortunate speculations; but to

Ethel she adhered steadily to her old story, namely, that John Hainton was a man who was always engaged in a desperate flirtation with some girl or other, and that he had shirked his visit to Barnsborow simply because he had gone so far with Maude Riversley, that he felt a week with her in a country house must bring things to a crisis. Sparingly and cautiously she would occasionally drop some observation to this effect before Maude, but Miss Mangerston was homœopathic in the administration of her poisons, and held the dispenser of fierce drastics as a practitioner beyond contempt, and whose machinations deserved to be speedily exposed and punished.

It is sad to think how persistent rumours to man or woman's detriment act to their disparagement in the eyes even of those who know them best, and esteem them

most. There never was malevolent proverb yet but what obtained implicit belief, and if there is one more often quoted than another, and regarded as a saying of the Saga, it is "that there is no smoke without fire." An absurd and wretched fallacy in these days, both practically and theoretically. We can cook a leg of mutton by a gas fire that shall give forth no particle of smoke, and preface it with a scandalous entrée containing no particle of foundation.

Miss Mangerston's persistent endeavours most decidedly bore fruit, for when the Barnsborow party broke up, Maude, indignantly though she repudiated it to herself, had doubts of Mr. Hainton's honest intentions implanted in her mind; while Miss Clothel, though she fiercely championed him if directly assailed, contemptuously as she might reject them, could not quite ignore her

companion's innuendoes. She would not permit them, she would not believe them, but she could not forget them.

With the outsiders of the party, who knew nothing of the county and little of John Hainton, the problem had resolved itself into whether he had levanted with somebody's wife or somebody's money. Ralph Leslie, it is true, steadily set his face against all these theories. He had, of course, met Hainton on several occasions, and had judged him more favourably than to deem such rumours to his disadvantage might not be insufficiently founded. One thing only was certain, that whatever might be the reason of John Hainton's sudden disappearance, he certainly could not complain that it was insufficiently discussed.

CHAPTER VI.

DEATH OF SIR JOHN.


DURING the Autumn months Frederick Riversley had astonished the turf section of the London world not a little. Many of the old bookmakers who remembered the reckless plunger of former days had welcomed him back to Doncaster and Newmarket, with all the cordiality that a bankrupt banking establishment bestows on a new client who opens a large account with them. These veteran fielders thought it meant grist to the mill with a vengeance. They were mistaken; they fell into a common error amongst "the kite division" of humanity, namely, that experience always fails to teach. In racing, no

doubt, it is the exception when it does so, but the wielders of the pencil were speedily alive to the fact that, foolish as Fred Riversley might have been in his youth, he was not given to throw away his money now. A good stake won over the Leger, and a veritable coup landed on the Cambridgeshire made the ring watch Captain Riversley's manipulation of the market with much respect. That he had confederates there was no doubt, but he apparently did the best part of his betting himself, and conducted his operations on a large scale. How does he get his information? clamoured those who had suffered heavily by betting with him. That was a question that, as yet, no one seemed capable of solving; but his victims grimly observed, "He seems to know a good bit more than some of us, and spots the pea as if he moved the thimbles."

Fred Riversley received all congratulations with the utmost imperturbability; he replied languidly, that luck was merely an attribute of man, usually balancing itself in his lifetime; that having had it dead against him for something like ten years, it was time there was a run in his favour. The gay-hearted guardsman of former times had been a young fellow whose wild animal spirits had more than once sufficed to carry off a dinner or supper party; such vivacity was catching and lit that mysterious spark upon which such gatherings depend. We all know it, we have all seen it scores of times. He, or she, may be neither wise nor witty, but that gay, joyous essence of mirth which laughs at dyspepsia, bad wine, or sodden entrées will successfully carry off a feast, while the perfectly served banquet of Lucullus is swathed in dulness. Captain Riversley of

the present, with his sardonic cynicism, would never have been suspected of this attribute. The broken dandy of former days, though his purse might be light, could never refuse a loan to a comrade. He would have been a bad judge of human nature who had tried that experiment on the returned exile.

But with the first chills of winter came the news that old Sir John was dead. A bad cold ended in congestion of lungs and carried him off in a few days. He was proud, after the fashion of his race. He had never alluded to the death-stab dealt him by his son, nor had the slightest communication taken place between the two since Fred's visit to Bunnington on his first return. Sir John and those about him had no idea that he was in danger until quite the last, and as long as he was capable of giving orders the



baronet sternly forbade that his son should be sent for. When Fred Riversley was, at last, telegraphed for, it was too late, and he arrived only to find that Sir John was dead. *Le roi est mort*, and he, Sir Frederick, reigns in his stead. Sir John could be hardly called a good landlord. Little of his income had he ever expended in improvements, requiring every shilling he could come by too urgently himself, to indulge in any such superfluous luxuries; wont to be somewhat greedy for his rents, after the manner of those sore pressed for the sinews of war, still he had been ever a just man and had borne much at times from tenants in difficulties sooner than eject them from their holdings. It might be that he had a fellow feeling, that he felt he himself possessed *his holding* alike subject to the merciful consideration of *his* creditors, but I incline more to the

belief that he considered those born vassals of the Riversleys, *i.e.* tenants, should not be dispossessed save under dire provocation. Certain it is, that the farmers of the Bunnington lands were stirred to much grief at his death. He had been a kindly landlord, and though proud enough to his equals, had been ever courteous and free-spoken to those under his sway ; would shake hands warmly with farmer Harris, for instance, asking heartily after his wife and daughters, while the slight inclination of the spine that he vouchsafed the entire Snoodleson family, the head of which had made a hundred thousand pounds over a soldier's boot contract during the Crimean war, was a refreshing sight to witness.

However, the funeral meats are baked ; the black horses and plumes, the scarves, hatbands, and all the panoply of woe are

collected by the paid mourners, who officiate at our burying in these times. What a grim burlesque are forty-nine funerals out of fifty. Round the open grave, the dead man's neighbours talked of the political situation, and the tenantry of the price of corn and live stock, while his son watched the proceedings with inflexible face. Seven years' knocking about amongst the scum of Europe had made Sir Frederick cool, cynical, hard, and unscrupulous; but though he concealed it well, he could not but feel bitterly the death of the fine old man, who, with all his numberless faults, had ever been an indulgent father to him. He blamed himself in no way for his conduct at their last interview. Sir John had run through what should have been his inheritance, and because he had unexpectedly come into another, he certainly considered that he was in no way bound to

sacrifice that and the remainder of his life to the redeeming of Bunnington. No, he stood firm to his first business-like decision ; at his father's death, Bunnington must go to the hammer, and the time was come.

There was little loss of appetite displayed over the "funeral meats" in the dining room. The gentlemen of the neighbourhood who had attended speculated upon what the new baronet would do ; recalled anecdotes of poor Sir John, wondered whether there would be a sale, and if that oily brown sherry now going down their throats so pleasantly, would, under such circumstances, be in the market. Was there much of it ? and was there any quantity of that grand '48 claret still in the cellar ? As for the farmers, they ate and drank stolidly ; but their speculations took a somewhat different and more gravely personal form. It had

oozed out there was considerable probability of the Bunnington property being sold, and men might well speculate grimly, and drink deeply as they did so, who saw no immediate outcome of the situation further than it was more than possible they would have to seek new homes. To abandon the home of your birth and childhood is a tearing up of the roots that kills at times, but is, to say the least of it, a bitter wrench, especially when involuntarily.

In the library, standing with his back to the fire, the new baronet looked with impassable face at his uncle, the Reverend Mortimer, and Mr. Sanderson, the family solicitor, as they refreshed the inner man. Mortimer Riversley was sincerely sorry for his brother, but what would you have ? The appetite may be healthy after fifty, but the sensibilities are apt to get a little blunted ;

and regret them much, as we may, it is impossible to feel for the nearest relatives from whom our paths have been long severed, that abandonment of grief which poetry and fiction so constantly insist upon. Mortimer Riversley accorded as much love to the dead man, as most brothers, but the keen, frosty air had sharpened his appetite, and honestly as he might mourn poor John, he conceived that no reason for doing violence to the cravings of his stomach. The game pie was excellent, and the brown sherry a wine to risk gout about when you came across it. Sir Frederick, though he ate nothing but biscuits, gulped down more than one bumper of it, and appeared waiting for his companions to commence the conversation.

“Well, Fred,” observed the Rector, diligently searching for another truffle in the interior of the pie, “I’m afraid you have

inherited a somewhat shattered property. Poor dear John was too freehanded, generous, and confiding a man in his youth not to have been spoiled by the unscrupulous, to say nothing of being a wee bit extravagant in his tastes. Poor fellow, I never thought to lose him so soon. You may think it odd, Fred, my talking like this, and pronounce it conventional jargon, but you're wrong, my boy. We were ever good friends, and if we saw little of each other of late years, I can think of those former times, when we shot, boated, and rode together, and when, if poor John could always beat me over a country, I was a long way his master on the river."

"Yes, my poor father always said you could give him any lengths with the sculls," rejoined Fred Riversley, sententiously ; "however, I don't suppose you, either of

you, did much boating after the Oxford days."

"No; and, though Bunnington was always open to me, I didn't come here so much after I married. No fault of poor John or your mother; they were both always kindness itself; but a curate, and I was only that, of course, to start on, has not much money to run about with; and even when I got a living, the cost of the outing to Bunnington for a week hardly seemed worth it for both of us. When I came it was usually *en garçon*. I am afraid the old place is terribly encumbered."

"Mortgaged to the last stick, pledged to the very salt spoons; dipped past redemption."

"You don't surely mean, Frederick, that it will come to the hammer?"

The new baronet nodded.



“Dear me!” exclaimed the Rector, as his face assumed an expression of deep concern. “Why, Bunnington has been in the family three hundred years or more; it’s terrible to think of its being sold. Surely there must be some way of averting such a downfall as that. Remember, you are a wealthy man now, and money can do so much. In this case, everything, no doubt.”


“You are right,” replied Sir Frederick. “No one knows the value of money much better than I do. I have been taught the lesson pretty sharply of late years, and seen men and women stoop to anything, stick at nothing, to obtain it. No, uncle, to ransom Bunnington is to condemn myself to comparative poverty for pretty well my lifetime. I’m sorry the old acres must go, but I don’t mean to dedicate my life to clearing the property for my successors.”

“Still, Fred, I can’t bear to think of the old house going into the hands of strangers.”

It was a very natural feeling on the part of the Rector, but it was the indulging of sentiment at his nephew’s expense, as it was from him the sacrifices must come if Bunnington were to be redeemed.

“Yes, it is a pity,” rejoined Sir Frederick, “but remember, Uncle Mortimer, I’ve had little to do in bringing about the present state of affairs. I take no credit for that. I should have done as my poor father did, and his father before him, I have no doubt, had the chance been vouchsafed me ; but I never had the opportunity. It was all done when I became one-and-twenty. Sanderson will tell you it was so, and also endorse what I say, that Bunnington must go.”

“Poor John, it would have embittered his last moments to know this.”



“He did know it,” replied the baronet, in a low voice. “I had a painful scene with my poor father on the very point. We parted bad friends because I made no secret of my intentions. Of course, I know, there are men who, under such circumstances, dedicate their lives to repairing the imprudence of their predecessors, but I decline the *rôle* of a family martyr. Henceforth the Riversleys of Hertfordshire are no more.”

There was no denying that Sir Frederick had common sense and justice on his side, but his hard, dry manner of putting the case, jarred upon his uncle’s ears. He was sincerely sorry for the loss of his brother, but it may be questioned whether the idea of the old place going to the hammer was not the greater shock to his feelings. He had known that Sir John was a confirmed invalid for some time. His death he was aware might

be looked for, but that it should occasion the sale of Bunnington he had never dreamt. He knew the estate was a good deal indebted, but had no idea it was hopelessly so. He would have been above ordinary humanity had he not remembered, during his nephew's prolonged disappearance, that he was next heir ; only that vanished scapegrace between him and the baronetcy ; he could not help occasionally speculating on intelligence some day arriving of Fred's death, and we may be sure that his wife would not overlook such a possibility. The Rector, and his wife, too, were proud of the former's family, and it would be a decided annoyance to think they could no longer describe themselves as of the Hertfordshire Riversleys. All these things ran through the Reverend Mortimer's mind as he sipped his sherry.

"Well, Fred," he said, at last, rising from


his chair, "I must be off, or I shall lose my train. I'm very, very sorry the old place must go, but, of course, there's a good deal in what you urge. When we come to town in the spring I hope you'll come and see your aunt, and be re-introduced to your cousins ; they were mere children when you saw them last. We shall be delighted to see you. Good-bye ;" and the pair shook hands, cordially.

The Rector shook his head meditatively, as he drove to the station, more than once. Could it be that the vanishing of even the vaguest expectations is always matter of disappointment ?

CHAPTER VII.

SOLANO'S COMMISSION.

MR. SOLANO occupied a somewhat anomalous position in Sir Frederick's household, and occasioned some marvelling amongst the few admitted to the Baronet's intimacy, as to what his exact duties might be. Sir Frederick described him as his *factotum*, his *alter ego* ; but, all the same, seemed to look after things pretty much himself. The baronet, indeed, consorted but little with the friends of his former days ; his present associates were, some of them old, some of them young ; but there was one similarity amongst them, they were all monied men, and some city men in a large way. One of



the most notable of these was Mr. Deblitz, the great financier, co-trustee of Lord Lithfield. It was odd ; but, despite his old friendship with the Viscount, of his two trustees, the one that Sir Frederick was most intimate with now, was the great Mr. Deblitz.

Solano, though he resided in his patron's house, was apparently of a retiring disposition, and kept himself much in the background. He did not care for places of public resort—frequented them but little, and constantly eschewed his place at the dinner-table, upon finding the Baronet expected friends. Lord Lithfield, who met him there upon one occasion, unexpectedly, remarked quietly, to his host, that he should take it as a favour if he would omit asking either himself or Solano, on the same day for the future. “ I'm not particular, Fred,

but that fellow ought to be doing penal servitude, as you know very well. What the deuce you keep such a scoundrel about you for, I can't conceive !”

“He's clever, and I *know* him,” replied the Baronet. “He stood to me in my own hard times, so I like to give him a share of my sunshine. If I can forgive his attempt to personate me, I don't think it matters to other people. I've seen men do worse to turn a hundred or two.”

“But, of course, he'll rob you if you give him the chance ?”

“Certainly ; but I don't.”

“If you can't trust the man, I do not see how he can be of much use to you,” rejoined the Viscount.

“Never mind ; he is in divers ways.”

“It would be indiscreet to inquire further,

but, you bear in mind, I don't covet his society."

"All right: it was an oversight his dining here to-day, though he's perhaps no worse than some you rub shoulders with in society."

"At all events, if that is so, society don't know it. In Mr. Solano's case we do, and don't mean to overlook it," rejoined Lithfield, a little sharply.

Solano, meanwhile, continued to pursue his mysterious avocations, which, whatever they might be, took him a good deal city wards. He spent much of his time in dingy little offices in the vicinity of the Exchange, with which he was apparently quite familiar—wicked little offices—some of them in which many bogus schemes and much villainy were concocted. Mr. Solano had figured, during his previous career in Eng-

land, as the *beau ideal* of a nineteenth century brigand, a Robin Hood of the eighteen sixty's; and, like most heroes of that fraternity, he came at length to infinite grief. Not a visionary company of those days that he had not something to do with; not a turf robbery that he could not tell tales about. From floating a fraud in the financial world, to nobbling a Derby favourite, there was nothing that this modern Schinderhannes had not turned his attention to. He perished in the great crash of '66. Limited banks, that were rotten to the core, with which he was closely connected, together with sound commercial businesses, in which his gains were invested, went down like card-houses. His turf creed of that year was infinite belief in the Danebury hoops, and much incredulity respecting Lord Lyon's fore-legs. New-

market and Epsom were as more breaking banks to him. This racecourse Rob Roy, this Stock Exchange Schinderhannes, had more writs out against him, ere the season was ended, than ever had his Highland or Rhine-land prototypes during their whole careers. Like them, he sought safety in flight. He did not see Doncaster, which, though perhaps disappointing to some of his acquaintance, was as well ; for his disbelief in Lord Lyon had in nowise abated, and, as may be remembered, again the incredulous got mulcted for their scepticism. Such, in brief, is the history of Solano, who had been leading a vagrant predatory life on the Continent, for some three years or so, when Sir Frederick first met him, and, under whose tuition, he acquired a perilous knowledge of cards, and a shrewd insight into the science of living by his wits.

What could induce Frederick Riversley to keep this witness of his degradation ; this preceptor, under whom he had graduated as a blackleg, still with him, when he was virtually rehabilitated, with all the means and inducements to live cleanly. Was it that he feared the disclosures that Solano might make ? His conversation with that worthy disproves that idea. Sir Frederick had contracted two very ordinary weaknesses.


The first of these was this : Nobody was ever beaten yet who would not give a good deal to display infinite dexterity at that identical game, almost immediately. It is seeking consolation for outraged vanity. There never was broken turfite, or bankrupt Stock Exchange man, who did not dream of returning, at some time, to be pre-eminent in either of those pursuits. It is as much

human nature, that the whilom pigeon should exult at developing into the rook, as for the young University man to come home and defy the village club, that once held him so cheap, to bowl him out. Frederick Riversley had this weakness to a considerable extent, and, to give the ring "a shaker," was an ambition he would have risked much for.

Secondly, the spendthrift constantly develops, later, a keen lust for the acquisition of money, and this had now become a passion with the baronet. You must not think he was a miser—far from it—he was of an extremely speculative turn, which your miser never is. He was prepared to risk moneys, to some extent, providing there was promise of handsome and rapid returns, and the risk did not look excessive. It was these two things that had combined to

make Sir Frederick retain Solano in his service. He believed in his cleverness, both at Newmarket and the Stock Exchange. It was by his advice that he cultivated the children of Mammon, instead of the children of Fashion, with such assiduity.


That Solano should be chary of appearing in the more frequented haunts of men, was but natural : let alone numberless unsettled turf transactions, there were several financial schemes, the collapsing of which had threatened to bring their promoters within the clutches of the law. Solano, like many others of those connected with such, wisely betook himself abroad before the law had quite made up its mind on the matter ; but he felt a little uncertain whether even his ten years' expatriation had purchased condonation of his iniquities. He argued, that it could be hardly worth while to take pro-



ceedings against such a man of straw as himself—one from whom there could be no possibility of recovering lost capital, while the rancorous hate with which men view those who have successfully despoiled them of their gold, usually softens down with the lapse of years. The exasperated victim who would have ruthlessly prosecuted at the time of his loss, does not think it worth while to lay the robber by the heels ten years afterwards, especially when it is a question of vengeance only, and there is no power of compelling the accused to disgorge. So Solano, as he fancied, was allowed to go on his way unnoticed. He knew that it would not do for him to put himself prominently forward in any of those projects about which he was now busying himself ; but his employer's was a good name on a board of directors. Solano had a pretty gift for the

plausible manipulation of figures, an art, I take it, that is the main essential for a great financier.

While they were companions abroad, Solano had been wont to amuse Fred Riversley by accounts of successful coups, brought off on the Turf or in the City, all of which were characterised by very sharp practice, in some shape or other—proceedings, that though they might not be legally unfair, yet must have been pronounced so by any honourable man. Mr. Slick has somewhere remarked, that when a gentleman turns blackguard, he is exceptionally gifted, and usually eclipses his baser born fellows, and the seven or eight years that he had knocked about the Continent, in the company of demireps, vauriens, and adventurers, had left Fred Riversley unburthened with a shred of principle.



This worthy pair were lounging in front of the dining-room fire, in the snug little house in Chesterfield Street wherein the baronet had established himself, one evening in early spring. A nearly emptied claret-jug stood between them, while a tray, containing coffee and liqueurs, had evidently been just placed upon the table.

"Now we'll talk a little business," said Sir Frederick, as, having selected a cabana, he threw his case across to Solano. "First, the City news; those Guatemala shares keep going up?"

"Yes, and are going a bit higher yet. They are twelve per cent. better than when you bought in, and I'd trust 'em to spring seven or eight points still. That will be good enough to sell at. I keep my finger on the pulse of the market, anyway, and will give you prompt notice when to clear out."

“And that Rio Mining Scheme?” observed the baronet, interrogatively.

“Will suit you to have a hand in floating—it’s as rotten as a pear, and will blow up in a year or two; but there’s money to be got out of it to start with. You must have a dig at that.”

“Five or ten?” said Sir Frederick, sententially, as he turned over the pages of his note-book.

“I’d play bold: go ten thousand, and clear out before six months are over. You will get about ten per cent. out of it that way; but if it is only five, don’t hold on. That Rio Mine, mark me, is a first-class fraud.”

“Excellent things when you’re in ’em,” returned the baronet, with a dry laugh. “Now about Leatherlungs for ‘the Guineas?’”

“Just what I’ve told you all along; a

rattling good colt, but they can't train him."

"I laid another two thousand against him last week ; but just remember, I'm very bad against this horse, and I want facts not suppositions."

"I am telling you what I know to be the case, and a thing I have in some degree verified with my own eyes. They can't train him, and know it, but they've too much money on to let him drop back much in the betting ; they want to save as much of their stake as possible, and therefore they keep him cantering. But whenever they gallop him in earnest, his leg will go to a moral. They take tens to one ; why, it's guineas to gooseberries against him. Never stop laying, that's my advice."

"Well, I've acted up to it pretty conscientiously so far," said Sir Frederick.

"Now about another thing——" And here he paused, and looking into the fire, continued to pull dreamily at his cigar.

Solano watched him attentively. His missions so far had been relating to the City and Newmarket; what could this "other thing" be for which he was required? The further he wormed himself into his employer's confidence, "the more necessary and the more powerful I shall become," argued the crafty satellite; "it might become my turn to be master again. Let me ever get your head under my belt, Sir Frederick, as the saying goes, and, on my faith, you'll learn what your nose to the grindstone really means."

"You could find out whether a person I once knew is in London by taking a little trouble, I suppose?" said the baronet, at length.

“Can’t say, till I know more,” replied Solano. “It’s a woman, of course?”

Sir Frederick nodded.

“What is the use of fencing with me? You must tell me all about her if I’m to be any good. She’s not a woman in society, naturally, or else you could conduct your inquiries better than myself. ‘A free lance,’ I presume?”

“Yes, I suppose that is about what she would be put down as. Still in society, to some extent.”

“Exactly; a star of that border land men drop when they marry, or at all events pretend to. ‘Happy the nation that has no history,’ said someone, in days gone by; happier still these ladies have mostly histories, and a taste for cigarettes. To find out whether a leader of “the marches” is about town, still

should be easy. May I ask the lady's name ?”


“Marion Gardiner,” replied the baronet, drily.

Solano pricked up his ears, and, becoming immediately still more interested, said :
“Living when last heard of, where ?”

“Is a matter of no consequence to you ; had she been there still, I should not have invoked your assistance. She left her old residence years ago.”

“Chut ! I might have known that,” returned Solano, biting his lips. “I am growing stupid, Sir Frederick, or I should have asked you no such foolish question. Marion Gardiner ! I’ll not ask you for a description ; but you’ve, perhaps, a photograph ?”

“No,” replied Sir Frederick ; “I’ve nothing of that kind to help you. It is a



matter of no great consequence ; still, if you can make out Mrs. Gardiner, let me know."

"Mrs. Gardiner," observed Solano, at length, "will be probably not difficult to trace if still in London."

"No, I should imagine you would hear of her without much difficulty."

"Except under one possibility," said Solano.

"And that is ?" inquired the baronet.

"That she has married again."

The two men exchanged a rapid glance, and then Sir Frederick observed, languidly, "What should make you think that ?"

"I don't think it. I only suggest it may be so."

"Ah, yes, of course. Good night. I feel sleepy. Don't bother, but if you can make out anything about Marion Gardiner, I should like to know it, that's all ;" and so

saying, Sir Frederick took his bedroom candlestick.

“Yes, and so should I,” mused Solano, as he slowly finished his cigar. “I wonder what she has had to say to his life, that he should be so curious about her. A man like Riversley don’t care much, as a rule, to pick up the dropped stitches of a liaison that dates some seven years back or more. This is interesting; a hold upon you in ~~this~~ country, my worthy patron, would be a thing worth having. You are clever, and a credit to your preceptor. I never turned out a more accomplished pupil. Marion Gardiner! I feel very curious to know what his relations could have been with Marion Gardiner. Of course, I shall charge secret service money for this, though he is much too sharp to be bled to any extent over it. No; I taught Fred a good deal, and he’s

apparently lived with those who have taught him more. The truth is, the one thing likely to deceive him now : he never sincerely believes anyone ; and as for myself, while feigning to trust, especially mistrusts me. Such men always come to grief. The successful adventurer is he who can pick out those he can trust, and who have it in their power to be useful to him. The trustworthy man you don't want, is no more worth cultivating than a crop that don't pay for the growing ; but the game of life can be no more played single-handed than whist. You must trust your partner ; Riversley don't, he plays only one hand ; that's not whist." And so saying, the philosopher rose and betook himself to his couch.

CHAPTER VIII.

SIR FREDERICK CULTIVATES HIS RELATIONS.

SOLANO felt somewhat elated at his last instructions. If there was one thing he dearly longed for it was to obtain some hold upon his patron in this country. Some tangible hold, of course, for Sir Frederick had already shown how little he feared any disclosures that his quondam ally might make of his doings abroad. Solano was too much a citizen of the world not to recognize at once that if the brazen pipkin was not intimidated at being called black by the earthen pot, it was only too probable that the fate of the pot would be strictly in accordance with the fable. Sir

Frederick was right—he'd no cause on the whole to fear what a penniless adventurer like Solano might think fit to allege against him. But the revolt of his old pupil annoyed Solano. We none of us much like it when those we have instructed beat us at what we thought our game. Robert Macaire's gorge would rise at serving under Jaques Strop, and Solano felt somewhat in that position; Jaques Strop, moreover, being outwardly rehabilitated while still domineering over him in the matter of crime. It was enough to wound the self-esteem of any *chevalier d'industrie*, who counted himself of the first flight—to have to serve not only under one of his own recruits, but to find his talents occasionally jeered at besides. Solano chuckled at the commission to find Marion Gardiner.

“Given in the first place a mysterious

woman," muttered that worthy to himself. "Why should he want to see her? Mysterious, she is of course, or he'd have no trouble about finding her. Why does he want to find her? It can hardly be affection; affection would hardly have survived all these years without writing; affection rather given to pens and paper as far as my observations go. Poor relation; no, I don't think my friend Frederick is likely to be hunting up poor relations." Here Solano paused, leant his head upon his hand, and remained for two or three minutes, pondering over all other probable solutions of the mystery.

"I can only see two," he muttered at length. "She may be wife, daughter, or something, to some pal he made abroad, or at home before he was broke; possible, but not particularly likely. The other far more

probable—to wit, that the woman has a claim upon him of some kind—strong, I should think, from my knowledge of the man ; his besetting sin can hardly be called imprudent liberality. A claim he feels pretty sure will be urged, by his seeking her instead of leaving her to seek him. I am only justified in taking this somewhat limited view of the possibilities by my intimate knowledge of the man's character as he is now. Of course he was not so once ; he was not so when I first knew him even, but he is so now, and the transmutation takes much less time than people generally are aware of. I must first find the woman, and then get at what the exact nature of her claim may be. I shall be a better judge than she of the value of it ; but if it should prove to be good for anything, and I get the pulling of the

strings, you will dance to a lively tune, Sir Frederick."

The quasi secretary, while flitting round the Stock Exchange, and looking in upon any money-making hive within which he could count upon a tolerable reception—while interviewing racing touts, watching the movements of the turf market, and occasionally running down to Newmarket to see what he could pick up for himself, still never forgot nor neglected the quest of Marion Gardiner. He pushed his inquiries through many dark and dubious channels, as well as searching for her through higher sources, but the result was the same ; at the beginning of May, about two months after he received his instructions, he was still without any information concerning her, whether she was alive, or indeed ever had lived ; as far as his own discoveries went

he knew not, while Sir Frederick not only declined to give the slightest further information concerning her, but it was evident somewhat regretted having ever given instructions for her discovery.

The disposition to hunt something is, we know, innate in man, and the tracking a fellow creature through the ins and outs of endless London I could fancy as exciting as the following up of any trail crossed on the prairies. Solano was persevering and patient as an Indian; his self-esteem was piqued at having failed to gain tidings of a lady whom he conjectured to have been probably known to a good many people in the London world, and he continued his search just as vigorously on his own account as he had begun it on his patron's. Another thing that stimulated Solano was this, no one ever more appreciated having


“a pull” over a man than he did, but for “a pull” over Sir Frederick, like Faust, he’d have forfeited his soul. The baronet was not a pleasant man, quite, to serve in a confidential capacity such as Solano’s; bitter of speech when speculation of either kind went awry; sparing of praise when it proved successful. Although winning a large stake by the breaking down of Leather-lungs about ten days before the Two Thousand, he manifested neither gratitude nor liberality, while he was wont to use the check string with needless brutality. It is astonishing how much hatred and hostility a man may hive up for himself by a brutal jeering manner to his inferiors, and it’s odds there’s one or two amongst them to whom the opportunity of exacting fierce retribution will come in the future.

As the season drew on Arthur Riversley

awoke to the fact that pleasure has to be paid for, and that when you have but a limited income, a year of revelry is wont to be followed by a season of sadness. As long as he figured as probable heir of the Latimer Estates, tradesmen were only too glad to have his name on their books; but that bubble once exploded, they showed a covetous anxiety to have his money in their pockets. In short, once convinced he was only a briefless barrister with vague and distant prospects, sundry of these gentry got a little uneasy about the settlement of their accounts, and subjected the unfortunate Arthur to a course of persistent "dunning." As Mr. Weller said of imprisonment for debt, this is a process which works unevenly, for whereas the neophyte is harassed and occasioned much mental perturbation, the hardened offender heeds

such appeals, whether piteous, insolent, or threatening, no more than a duck does a thunderstorm. Beset and worried in this wise, Arthur more than once thought over the possibility of appealing to his cousin for assistance. He had made Sir Frederick's acquaintance of course ; he had dined with him, and he really did think that considering all the circumstances the baronet really ought to do something for him, an opinion in which he was strengthened by more than one of his intimates, who deemed Sir Frederick was in some sort bound to do a little bit of graceful liberality, when he thought of the peculiar wording of his uncle's will.


And yet Arthur felt intuitively that his cousin was not a man to do a generous action, nor likely to listen with sympathetic ear to the story of his difficulties. If he has



shown himself miserably weak and conceited so far in this history, it must be borne in mind that many a young man, under less temptation than Arthur Riversley, has come out of the trials of his opening career no better, and that a sharp lesson at starting has brought ballast and better feeling to many. They have learnt that wholesome truth, to wit, his best and dearest friends cannot help the man who will not help himself; and mastered the truth of About's famous maxim, "that money, if not inherited or won in a lottery, is only acquired by work." To jibb at the collar at first is common enough; it has been at starting, even with those who now feel bored to death if long out of harness. Arthur was quite young enough yet to buckle to work, but he did not, as yet, grasp the necessity for doing so. He still clung to the idea, that his


cousin ought to help him ; as to what extent, he was vague in the extreme ; but he shrank from putting this view of his affairs before Sir Frederick. The young man could not have borrowed a few pounds without stammering over the request, differing in this respect considerably from some of his seniors, who would have proposed a small loan to the acquaintance of an hour without embarrassment, if they thought such an application likely to be successful. Arthur Riversley, meanwhile, mused moodily over his liabilities with a hazy idea that it was the baronet's bounden duty to, at all events, set him straight with the world once more.

As the season wore on, Sir Frederick heard of the arrival of his uncle in town. He was not much given at this time to study the conventionalities, but still he felt it incumbent on him to leave a card on the



Rev. Mortimer. It is doubtful whether much more would have come of it had not his uncle met him before he'd got a dozen paces from the door and insisted upon his turning back and having a cup of tea with his aunt and cousins. Sir Frederick assented, with somewhat indifferent grace, but he was most agreeably surprised. He had pictured to himself twenty minutes of platitudes ; he spent an extremely pleasant hour, and, as he made his bow, vowed that his cousin Maude, and her friend, Miss Clothele, were the two nicest young women he had come across for years. Ladies' society was a little apt to bore the baronet at this time, and a couple of clever and unconventional girls to talk to, a thing of which he lacked experience. From this out Sir Frederick cultivated his relations with considerable assiduity. He invited the family to a

quiet dinner, and both the Rev. Mortimer and Arthur felt sanguine about his volunteering to do something for the latter. As for Mrs. Riversley, she had utterly forgotten John Hainton, and could only think how well dear Maude and her newly-found cousin were suited to each other. The rector's wife was somewhat given to speculation on most social subjects, but the marrying of her eldest daughter was a topic on which she never tired of meditating. Mr. Hainton had found much favour in her eyes, but when a man goes suddenly abroad at the very time he is expected to propose, it argues, thought Mrs. Riversley, infirmity of purpose, or change of mind. Why John Hainton had gone abroad nobody seemed to have the least idea; about where he had gone even, his relations seemed puzzled. Mrs. Riversley had made due inquiry before



leaving Clumbershire, and all even his mother could tell was, "on business she believed, and that she thought he had gone to America." So that when Sir Frederick took to frequenting their house, the good lady viewed his visits with much approbation. She rightly judged that the baronet did not drop in so constantly to tea or luncheon, to see either herself or the rector, and with divers noddings and upraising of eyebrows, confided to her cronies that "it would do very well."

As for Maude, she never thought about her cousin's visits in that way at all. It seemed natural enough to her that Sir Frederick should seek the society of the only near relatives he had, and that while they were in London they should see a good deal of him was what might be expected. She cared very little about him, either one way

or the other ; if she didn't exactly like him, she didn't particularly dislike him. A near kinsman, of whom it behoved her to make the best, was about the summing up of her feelings towards him. As regards John Hainton, her breast was filled with a bitter sense of resentment. She felt that she had merited better treatment than she had received ; that John Hainton had gone too far to leave her abruptly without a word of explanation, or a line of adieu, and yet the sole clue to his disappearance was contained in those half dozen lines addressed to Lady Prosanbore. Could Miss Mangerston be right, mused Maude, as she recalled that conversation at Barnsborow, and was John Hainton but a mere male flirt after all ? Nonsense, the man's whole nature was against it. He, a man, who rode, shot, fished, or valed with a will, and as if his

heart and soul were in the amusement of the hour, was little likely to play the part of a *petit maître*. She had seen somewhat of the world of late, and Maude felt intuitively that it was not of such stuff these triflers were made. And, yet, if it were not so, how could he simulate such devotion, and then vanish without ever saying good-bye. She knew not what to think, but the predominant feeling in her bosom was, that she had been badly used, and, bitterest of all, that her dearest friends both knew it and pitied her.

How she detested Caroline Mangerston at this time. She never had liked her, and now, Miss Mangerston thought fit to affect a soft, sad sympathetic manner towards her that went near to madden Maude. Even Ethel Clothele she regarded with suspicion. She knew that Ethel's original opinion had been, that she'd. but to lift her finger to become

Mrs. Hainton. Ethel said nothing about this now, and when Maude purposely introduced John Hainton's abrupt and mysterious disappearance into their conversation, always evaded the subject. The fact was, Ethel had gradually given way to Caroline Mangerston's opinion of that gentleman, and had come to regard him as habitually given—

“To make love to the lips that are near.”

Miss Clothele felt more bitter than her friend about the whole affair, and inwardly vowed that John Hainton should obtain scant grace at her hands, if ever he should be at her mercy. An awkward vow this to have recorded against one, for dare the wisest of us say that any pretty woman of his acquaintance may not in time to come put her yoke about his neck. The bigger the hero the more utter his subjugation. From Hercules and Omphale to Nelson and

Lady Hamilton, the story never varies. How then can the small fry hope to escape the toils should they be laid for them. That the mouse slips through the meshes that entrap the lion is no doubt true, but the man laid siege to by a pretty woman is, to say the least of it, in considerable danger, and it is likely to go hard with him if the leaguer be not quickly raised.

Especially, did Arthur Riversley welcome the, what may be termed, domestication of Sir Frederick in the family circle. He regarded it from a peculiar view of his own as personifying capital at his back, and yet Arthur would have been fain to confess that his cousin still seemed a most impracticable person to appeal to for assistance.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PRICE OF ASSISTANCE.

THE spring had slipped away, and, as the London season waxed gayer and gayer, Arthur Riversley found his money difficulties increasing in like proportion. Not only did creditors get more importunate, but the ready money indispensable to a young man who moves in a somewhat lively section of society became every day harder to lay hands upon. The money-lenders to whom he had recourse last year, and who were not adverse to risking moderate advances at enormous interest, thought by no means so well of their speculation now Sir Frederick had reappeared. Far from being accommo-

dating with regard to further loans, they growled ominously at his applications to renew the bills they held. Arthur was meditating ruefully over these prospects one morning in his rooms in the Temple, but, for the life of him, he could hit upon only two solutions, and he could not quite make up his mind as to which course was the most unpalatable. Should he appeal to his cousin or his father? His heart misgave him when he thought of applying to Sir Frederick. He had listened more than once at bachelor dinners to the baronet's cynical talk, and felt rather nervous when he thought of the sarcastic terms in which a refusal might be couched. He might appeal to his father, but the Rev. Mortimer had already hinted that if he attended to his profession more, and to "the business of pleasure" somewhat less, he should be better

pleased with him ; moreover, his father would undoubtedly make his renunciation of the sweets of the season a condition of his assistance, and Arthur could by no means bring himself to that. Capua had not palled upon him as yet—it rarely does till the good is sucked out of us.

As he sat thus moodily ruminating, the click of the letter-box fell on his ear. “ Another brute, whose future depends upon my settling his account within ten days. I never realised how our lives were entwined till this year. My stopping payment would apparently bring desolation into various happy homes. I may as well look at it. Might be an invitation, by good luck. By Jove, it is!—Frederick’s hand—no dun, any way. ‘ Will I dine with him in Chesterfield Street, at eight on Thursday next ? ’ Let me see ! No, I’ve no other engagement ;


that will do very well. I'll write an answer to say yes at once."

He turned to the writing-table, artistically strewn with law-books, and scribbled his acceptance.

"It looks like fate," he muttered. "If I do get a *tête-à-tête* with him, I'll sound him on the subject. I funk asking him, he has such a bitter tongue on men's weaknesses now-a-days ; and yet, according to all accounts, his own early career was graced with more follies than most men's. Still, I think I would rather ask him than my father."

It was with a slight twitter of the nerves that Arthur knocked in Chesterfield Street on Thursday. He felt that, when he came out again, he might have preferred his petition, and preferred it in vain, and he had just begun to realise that in a somewhat vague fashion, he had counted more upon this

assistance than he fancied, until he found himself on the verge of asking for it. He was shown up into the pretty little drawing-room, and the *convives*, six in number, were speedily gathered together. Sir Frederick's rule about dinner-giving to men was simple—"The time mentioned is meant, and I grant ten minutes' law and no more, if I sit down alone. I keep a good cook, and don't see the fun of sitting down to cold soup and entrées because somebody else has been too lazy to dress in time. As regards the women, it's different. Of course you must dine when they choose to come; and as they rarely know anything about cookery, sodden dishes don't matter to them. A glass of champagne and a sweetbread while you are dressing, if you feel hungry, is to be recommended." The dinner was excellent, and the talk, led by the host and



Solano, amusing. The pair seemed to be well up in all that was going on in the great London world, in the turf world, and in the city, and the guests were thoroughly pleased with their entertainment. One was the eldest son of a wealthy Stock Exchange man, another the junior partner in a very speculative firm, while the third, and youngest, was the heir of a defunct cotton-spinner, and had, some three years before, inherited a large fortune, with a passionate desire to get into fashionable society. Arthur had of course met Solano before, but he had no idea that his cousin's managing man could be so agreeable a companion. A thorough citizen of the world, with suave manners, and a considerable fund of anecdote, Solano could be a very pleasant *causeur* when he listed. Was it not part of the stock-in-trade of such as he had been for

years? Without pleasant, easy manners, the *chevalier d'industrie* would scarce pick up a livelihood. Whist was the order of the evening upon returning to the drawing-room, but whist upon a moderate scale.

“Play what stakes you like, gentlemen ; but as there are three of us here who don’t play high, let us arrange that two of us three, Solano, my cousin, and myself, shall play against each other. We can easily cut out—the two highest of the small players play with the two highest of the gamblers, according to the cutting.”

But the others protested that they did not care about playing high, so a very modest rubber was at last inaugurated. Still, in spite of this sort of protest against gambling, Arthur noticed that his cousin made three or four heavy bets with the cotton-spinner chrysalis developing into

fashion's butterfly and the suckling stock-broker, but these were on turf matters, to which the chrysalis was ever and anon returning with more astounding manifestation of ignorance of the subject. The baronet's big regalias seemed to have the effect of weakening his whist, and strengthening his opinions ; and, after some severe revoking on his part, consequent on a total misapprehension of what were trumps, the whist-table broke up, and the players sought their coats and hats. Sir Frederick laughingly declined to lay Drygoods the odds against the favourite for the Ascot Cup, although he had good reason to believe that noble animal would not probably start—would certainly never get round the course if he did—as he rejoiced in a most portentous leg. A little more noisy chaff as the triumvirate departed, and

the host was left with Solano and his cousin.

“Very good-natured of you to let young Drygoods off that hundred,” said Solano, with a quiet laugh. “Stampede will never stand winding up. It’s all the odds he wanted against her ever seeing Ascot at all.”

“He was rather too screwed to bet with,” rejoined the baronet, significantly. “I am going to have a quiet cigar with Arthur, and then turn in.”

“All right—then I’ll say good-night, as I have some work to do before I go to bed. Good-night, Mr. Riversley ;” and, so saying, Solano departed.

The two cousins smoked silently for some minutes. Arthur was trying to screw his courage to the point. He felt that fortune had favoured him, and that he had an opportunity he could scarcely have hoped for. As

for Sir Frederick, he was musing over the pity he had been unable to lay that bet, but the baronet, though a keen practitioner, was careful to keep within due bounds. He always deprecated high play in his own house, and, indeed, was little given to it elsewhere. He knew that he had been mixed up in play transactions abroad that would be speedily raked up and brought to England if he should be fortunate at the card-table now-a-days. He prudently eschewed it except for such moderate stakes as could not produce gossip. There were plenty of other ways, he argued, of getting the better of his fellows which would attract no attention. Amateur book-maker and stock exchange speculation offered these advantages, providing always his fellows did not get the better of him. With the apprenticeship he had served, and Solano's

assistance, he did not think that probable, despite the many wool-gatherers who annually lose their own fleeces. And yet, little more than ten years ago, and Frederick Riversley had been as frank, high-spirited, honourable a gentleman as there was in Her Majesty's Service. Men get broke, recover, and turn out honest and respectable members of Society once more, but then they don't bemoan their iniquities amongst the continental watering-places.

"I am glad you asked me to stop, Fred," said Arthur, rather nervously, at last. "I particularly want to have a talk to you."

The baronet turned round and eyed his cousin keenly. He saw trouble and embarrassment in his face, and already half guessed the confession that was coming, but it was not in his nature now to make that avowal easier. It had been otherwise once,

and he might have remembered that when he told his father a similar story years ago, if it had been fruitless of result, it had, at all events, been kindly and sympathetically listened to. Useless confession it was bound to be, as poor Sir John lacked the means to assist him, though no word of upbraiding escaped his lips to the son who had trod his footsteps only too faithfully.

“The fact is I’ve got horribly into debt, and am disgustingly hard up,” continued Arthur, very quickly. “You see, the governor only gives me a moderate allowance, and I can’t expect to make anything at my profession as yet.”

“Well, you’re not in it yet, you know.”

“Just so. Then, of course, as a Riversley——”

“And heir to the Latimer estates,” added the baronet, dryly.

“Nonsense; I don’t mean that. But that, as a Riversley, I have been asked a good deal into society.”

“I do mean that; but go on.”

“I contend, as a Riversley, Fred—Now, what’s a man to do? Of course, it is my bounden duty to know all the right people I can. A man starting in life would be a fool not to do that,” and here Arthur paused for a reply.

“Very much so, except that, at your time of life, there is one considerable drawback to it.”

“Drawback! What can you mean? Surely it must be good to know all people moving in the best society.”

The baronet gazed at him for a moment with an amused expression, then, flipping the ash off his cigar, exclaimed—

“Still in the blind state of puppydom!

Now, don't be riled, but listen to me. I, recollect, have been some fifteen years collecting the little budget of wisdom I am going to transmit to you in considerably less than as many minutes. Society, at its best, will entertain you if you amuse it, and will drop you, as a rule, upon the first suspicion of your wanting a twenty pound note. Society saps your energy, saps your finances. Half-a-dozen good attorneys are fifty times more valuable acquaintances to you than half the peerage would be at present. You have a weakness for the great world? Good. Score off your own bat, and it is the great world comes to you, and then—be somewhat exclusive, and know those only who may be of use to you, who wield real power. Queens of beauty, if you will, if they sway men who hold power or command the whim, toy, or ribbon that you have set

your heart on. Never overlook, yet never overrate the power of women in the game of life ; and, remember, it's not society's belles by any means who pull strings of this description. Those women past the thirties, only nice-looking, but with low voice, fascinating manner, and keen intellect are the women to know. Don't bother your head about the beauties. Like the President of the United States their empire is of four years' tenure, and with much more limited patronage. The Ninons and Cleopatras are stars of a cycle like your great men. My lecture's finished. Go on, young 'un."

"Yes, and I daresay you're right in all you say," replied Arthur. "But what am I to do in the meantime?"

"Duns pressing?"

"Disagreeably so."

"Assets nothing, and been to the Jews, of course?"

Arthur nodded assent.

"Hum! First mucker. I should say, appeal to your father, and don't half do it. Let him know the lot."

"But I don't quite like to do that."

"Of course not. We none of us do, and, what's more, they like it less as a rule. Mine was an exception."

"Did he put you straight without a row the first time?" enquired Arthur, eagerly.

"No, he couldn't. He'd spent it all himself; but he was as sorry, poor old man, about the thing as I was."

"And then?" asked Arthur, whose curiosity about his cousin's former crash for a moment suspended the anxiety he felt about his own affairs.

"And then," rejoined Sir Frederick, in

mocking tones. "Well, you look like having a personal experience of the 'then.' The Jews advanced you money on the chance of my death, just as society advanced you invitations. Don't flatter yourself it was because you were a Riversley; it was because you were *the* Riversley likely to inherit the Latimer property, and, in days to come, the baronetcy."

"And, if it was so, and that I also fell into the same mistake, don't you think that it is incumbent on you to help me in the trouble that misconception has entailed upon me?" cried Arthur, passionately.

"Not exactly, *mon cher*," rejoined Sir Frederick, quietly. "You can't expect me to reimburse all the speculators on my death. It would hardly be good taste on my part to let them understand I know they wished me dead and buried."

Arthur felt the justice of his cousin's sarcastic rebuke. He was silent for a minute or two, and then said—

“You are not bound legally, of course, but you can easily conceive——”

“That you lulled yourself into the belief that I was dead, and basked in the sunshine of my anticipated inheritance,” laughed Sir Frederick. “Quite so. I should have done it myself at your age, and raised, I'll go bail, double the amount you managed to do on my prospects.”

“Then you decline to help me?” said Arthur, sullenly.

“I didn't say so. You have not even mentioned what help you require as yet.”

“Two thousand, nearly.”

“Not a bad beginning for the first year. Is that the whole of it?”

“Yes, it includes my Oxford ticks, start in town, &c., and all my bills.”

“Never mind the start in town, &c. I wouldn’t dwell upon that if I were you. Fathers generally write a cheque for that sort of thing, just as sons constantly go tick for the necessary furniture, and gamble away the money given them for its purchase. Two thousand is a stiff sum, Master Arthur.”

“But you will find it me, will you not? You surely owe me——”

“Nothing as yet,” interrupted the baronet sententiously. “Of course I may do, and then, perhaps, I may feel bound to redeem my debt by assisting you.”

“But you utterly decline to do anything for me now,” rejoined Arthur bitterly. “You might have saved my boring you with this confession if you’d only said so at first.”

“As I observed before, I didn’t say so,” rejoined the baronet, as he slowly ejected a cloud of tobacco smoke.

“I can’t understand you,” exclaimed Arthur impetuously; “you won’t and you will. What do you mean?”

“The first sensible question you have asked,” said the baronet, leaning forward in his chair towards his interlocutor. “My meaning is this, as a cousin I won’t give you a shilling, but as a brother-in-law, I’ll find you two thousand pounds.”

“As a brother-in-law—a brother-in-law!” gasped Arthur, utterly dumbfounded. “You don’t mean to say you want to marry Maude?”

“Just so; do you see any particular objection to the arrangement?” replied Sir Frederick sharply.

“No, no, certainly not; I only mean I

never thought you cared about Maude in that way."

"Very likely ; now listen to me. Women are very quick to learn that a man is smitten with them. It is just possible that your sister might have guessed that it was so, though you didn't. Do you think it is so?"

"On my word I don't know," replied Arthur.

"Good ! you see I can offer your sister an excellent position. In a worldly point of view, I'm a good match for her. An only brother can often persuade a girl a good bit in a matter of this sort, you understand. Remember, the day I'm engaged to your sister, you may consider your debts as off your shoulders."

"And what do you wish me to do?"

"Nothing just yet. When the time comes you will simply do what I tell you. You

needn't look dazed like that, it won't be above a week or two. In the meantime, if fifty is a convenience, there you are."

"Thank you awfully," said Arthur, as he crumpled up the crisp Bank of England note, and thrust it into his waistcoat.

This solution of his difficulties seemed delightful, and as Sir Frederick had said, from a worldly point of view, he was a good match ; there was no reason why he should not support his cousin in an affair which had conduced so much to his, Arthur's, interest. True, he had a strong notion that his sister, if not actually engaged, was in a fair way to be to John Hainton, but Hainton had gone abroad, and there was no use in troubling Sir Frederick about that.

"Well, Arthur, you understand," said the baronet, "I am going to make strong running on my own account just now, and I

count upon your interest in my behalf as soon as I call upon you to exert it."

"Depend upon me," said Arthur warmly.

"Yes, I think I can," returned his cousin drily.

They shook hands, and it was with a light heart Arthur Riversley walked home to the Temple. Of course Maude would accept Fred. Why he had as much money as Hainton, and then he could make her Lady Riversley—an addition that would of course turn the scale with any woman.

CHAPTER X.

MISS CLOTHELE'S DANCE.

"MR. HAINTON, Enderly Park, Boodle's Club, St. James' Street," exclaimed Miss Clothele, pausing in her tramp up and down her own drawing-room to take the card a servant proffered her. "He didn't ask to come in, Robert, I suppose?"

"No, Miss."

"I rather wish he had, Caroline, don't you? I should like to hear how he accounts for his mysterious disappearance."

"I don't feel your curiosity about it; I have told you my estimate of Mr. Hainton some time since. You always vowed he was head over heels in love with your friend Miss

Riversley. As I told you, Ethel, the man is an incorrigible flirt."

"But what has that got to do with his abrupt disappearance?"

"Everything. He felt doubtless that he had gone so far with Miss Riversley, that to meet her for a week in a country house would end almost inevitably in the loss of his freedom. He saw people began to make way for him where she was concerned; in short, that they looked upon it as 'a case.' He took to his heels; those sort of men always do under such circumstances. They go abroad till *we* get over it."

"I can hardly think that. I don't believe, Caroline, John Hainton is a despicable wretch of that kind; I always thought him a straightforward honest gentleman, especially in his love for Maude."

Miss Mangerston, who was seated at the

writing-table, nibbled the top of her pen for a few seconds, and then said softly : " I dare say you are right, Ethel, but you must excuse my not agreeing with you. When a man goes as far as Mr. Hainton has gone, he behaves badly in my opinion if he does not ask the girl to marry him."

" If I really thought that was the meaning of his going abroad, I declare I would never speak to him again," said Ethel ; and there was something in the slightly hesitating tones that might have made a shrewd observer suspect she was already leaning towards her companion's opinion.

" Shall I send him a card for to-night ? " inquired Miss Mangerston. " Of course, ignorance of his being in London is excuse enough for the shortness of the invitation. No doubt he has only just arrived, or we must have heard of him."

"Yes, do," replied Ethel ; "he will meet Maude at all events, if he has not already done so, and I shall be able to form some judgment of which of us is right in her opinion. 'We shall perhaps hear what account he gives of his absence."

"Oh, I'll tell you that—'pressing business called him abroad ;' he said that in his note, you know. You're not likely to get anything more definite from him."

"You dislike Mr. Hainton," said Ethel suddenly. "Why?"

"Because I say, under the circumstances, that he will be vague in the extreme concerning his foreign trip? No ; I only speak out of my experience of humanity generally, who are invariably reticent concerning what I may term their clandestine flittings."

"Did you two ever quarrel?"

“My dear Ethel! Why, he is barely conscious of my existence.”

Miss Clothele said no more, but she felt no doubt about Miss Mangerston's dislike for John Hainton ; nevertheless, she was fast coming round to Miss Mangerston's way of thinking. At all events, as she had said, his meeting with Maude would surely tell the lookers-on the precise state of the case, and if, as she had conjectured, he had only just arrived in London, it was very possible he did not know where the Reverend Mortimer had set up his tent this season, or even for certain whether he and his were in Town.

“Send him a card, Carrie,” she observed at length, “and tell him he will meet his enchantress.”

“Much better not tell him that,” replied Miss Mangerston. “If you are right in


your ideas, he will come to any invitation of yours, knowing that he is certain to meet Miss Riversley, if she is in London. On the contrary, if I am right, he will probably not come, and plead he received his invitation too late."

"Do as you like; but you'll see Mr. Hainton will be early in the field."

"It may be. I think otherwise; we shall see."

This party for which John Hainton was sent an invitation at such short notice, was a dance given by Miss Clothele in Princes Gate. It had been a good bit discussed in society, as it was known that it was to be restricted to such limited dimensions that dancing should be really possible and enjoyable. Difficulty about getting places or invitations for any entertainment, it is well known, stimulates the thirst for obtaining them, and Miss

Clothele had undergone much embarrassment in parrying hints and petitions on this head ; people generally being profoundly impressed with the idea that just two or three more could not make any difference, and perfectly oblivious to the fact that in such cases twos and threes speedily amounted to hundreds. John Hainton's mysterious absence had been an opportunity that Miss Mangerston had not failed to improve to the best of her ability. As we know, she cherished no good-will for either Maude or Hainton, and would gladly gratify her malice by promoting a rupture between them ; but what she did dearly long for was to occasion a breach between Miss Riversley and Ethel. She knew that she had sown doubts of Hainton's loyalty in the minds of both girls. They indignantly refused to listen to her theory that John Hainton was a mere philan-



derer—that is, to speak more correctly, Ethel did. Poor Maude was, of course, in great measure, tongue-tied. She could not answer. She was compelled to affect indifference or betray herself one of the lady-killer's victims—a humiliation that a proud girl would sooner perish than admit. But Miss Mangerston saw that her accusations went home, and that Maude was gradually beginning to absorb the poison so continuously trickled into her ears. Ethel, it was true, protested vehemently, as she had just done, but Caroline Mangerston saw that her loyalty was sapped, and though her tongue might still stand up for the deserter, her mind was ripe to receive testimony to his disadvantage.

So far her cards had played themselves, but the reappearance of Hainton upon the scene necessitated some manipulation on her part. What should she do about this invi-

tation, for instance—send it or not send it? She thought the former. “To keep it back will only delay the meeting of the lovers a few days. They shall meet to-night, and a final rupture must be accomplished between them. If I could but make Ethel the cause! Difficult, but possible. We shall see. In the meantime, I’d best write Hainton’s card; but to convince Ethel that he is in no very great earnest in his wooing, I must name a late hour instead of the very unfashionable ten. If I put twelve, he will look upon it as supper and a dance after the theatres, instead of the ‘small and early’ affair it really is, and drop in accordingly—no indelicate hurry to see the presumed lady of his love about that!” muttered Miss Mangerston, with a wicked smile. “But how to bring about the other part of my little comedy? Ah! I am afraid I must trust to

my star and the chapter of accidents. But, Miss Riversley, if I could show you your lover bending to Ethel's yoke, I think I should seek my pillow exulting."

Miss Clothele had given her guests clearly to understand that ten meant ten, and that it was to be an early party; consequently eleven saw most of them assembled, although, thanks to Miss Mangerston's manoeuvre, John Hainton was not amongst them. How much mischief she should be able to manufacture out of the evening, that young lady did not as yet know; but she was possessed with the very spirit of malice. She had taken care that Maude should be informed that her lover was expected, as soon as she arrived, and lost no opportunity of calling Ethel's attention to Mr. Hainton's non-appearance.

"You will find I am right in my views," she whispered to Miss Clothele. "Half-past

eleven, and no sign of this love-lorn swain as yet."

She had no fixed design at present in all this, but she conceived it might assist her machinations to irritate Ethel as much as possible against the absentee ; while she had further maddened Maude by sympathetic whispers to the effect that "gentlemen did dawdle so at their clubs, but that Mr. Hainton, though it was getting late, would be there, she felt sure." Having made all the arrangements in her power to secure John Hainton a chilling reception, Miss Mangerston awaited that gentleman's arrival with much satisfaction and no little curiosity.

The galope preceding supper had just struck up when Hainton made his appearance, not unreasonably late in doing so, when we remember the hour named upon his card of invitation ; but on the presump-

tion that he had been bidden at ten, an ordinary keen-sighted hostess would have pronounced that he had merely dropped in for supper, and meant to bear no share in the immediate diversion of the evening. Ladies who give real dances are sometimes much exercised at the cool indifference manifested by the young men of this generation to that amusement.

“Wretches,” quoth a vivacious hostess, to the writer, “they prefer an ortolan in aspic to the best valse Strauss ever wrote, and plovers’ eggs to ‘The Night-belle Galope’ infinitely. When I was a girl, thank goodness, they had a good deal more ‘go’ and a good deal less appetite.”

John Hainton was rather taken aback at discovering the assemblage in the flood-tide of a spirited dance ; he had expected to find them still gossiping round the supper-


table, and could not understand how the existing state of things had come about. He was wandering rather aimlessly about the doorway, when he was espied by Miss Mangerston, and that lady at once made up her mind to take possession of him. With her sweetest smile, she requested her partner to take her across the room, and then added, "You must excuse me for a moment. In my character of assistant-hostess, I see one or two late arrivals I must chide civilly in Ethel's behalf." Another second, and she was shaking hands cordially with her victim, who was somewhat surprised at the warmth of her greeting.

"I'm so very glad to see you back, Mr. Hainton. Your friends have been lost in astonishment at your sudden disappearance. Only that your own people voted that you were all safe, I think we should have put

you down kidnapped, and there would have been as much fuss about your disappearance as is usual about a suspected murder. We must look for Ethel, who will be delighted to see you; and, dear me, I forgot your former attraction, Maude Riversley, is here somewhere, and no doubt will welcome you warmly. Was it not odd, her lost cousin turning up after all."

"I saw something about it in the papers," muttered Hainton, in utter despair of stemming the flood of eloquence let loose upon him.

"Oh, yes! and now his father's dead, he's Sir Frederick, you know. Sad disappointment for poor Arthur, as you may conceive; and yet rumour has it the Latimer estates won't go altogether out of *his* family."



"Of course not; his cousin inherits them."

"Oh, yes! and you know how people talk; but they do say he means sharing them with Maude. At all events, they are always together."


"I don't understand you."

"No, well! but stop. Ah, the riddle will explain itself. Here comes Maude Riversley, and that slight dark man upon whose arm she is leaning, is her cousin, Sir Frederick, and the world has it that she will be Lady Riversley before long. Unless, ha, ha!—they never thought of that—you interfere to prevent it."

"And there were people who deemed that Miss Mangerston had nothing to say for herself."

The result of this meeting can easily be conceived. Hainton addressed Maude in

somewhat constrained fashion ; while the girl, her pride wounded by his unaccountable neglect, and aware that she was under the keen cynical eye of Caroline Mangerston, returned it in the coldest and most conventional manner. As for Sir Frederick, he regarded Hainton with supercilious indifference, as if his being there at all was a questionable liberty. Although Arthur had refrained from enlightening him concerning his rival, yet the baronet was too wily a man not to put a few questions as to whether his cousin had been much in society, &c., and speedily elicited what he wanted to learn, that Hainton had been a devoted admirer all last season, but had suddenly gone off, Heaven only knew where. Whether to look after big game in India, or the sources of the Nile and the development of Central Africa, no one could say.




If the two leading actors in this little drama walked away sore with each other, and bitter at heart, their partners in the play felt equally jubilant at the result of the meeting. It was clear to both of them that Maude Riversley and John Hainton were, to put it mildly, no longer in *rapport*.

“ ‘The little rift’ is very apparent,” said Miss Mangerston to herself, as they passed on. “It shall be my business to permanently enlarge it. Please take me downstairs, and feed me, Mr. Hainton ; I have danced myself into a state of positive famine.”

Miss Clothele became aware for the first time that John Hainton had availed himself of her invitation, as the pair entered the supper-room. Had he seen Maude, she wondered. Apparently, for she saw that he

passed close to Miss Riversley without stopping to speak, and surely he would not have done so unless that had been the case. Judging from the hour at which he had thought proper to make his appearance, there had been no feverish anxiety about meeting the lady to whom but a few weeks back he had displayed such open devotion. Miss Clothele's brow contracted slightly as she saw that John Hainton, though seated in Maude's immediate vicinity, made no attempt to address her. Was Caroline Mangerston right? and had Mr. Hainton the audacity to think that a girl like Maude was to be thrown on one side like a pair of old gloves, when he should weary of saying soft things to her? Ethel ground her little white teeth as she thought of how society smiles over a lovelorn damsel, and muttered in her wrath, "Oh, that I were a man, for



his sake ; but as I am not, I'll even be a very woman, for her's."

The fair object of Ethel's solicitude in the meanwhile showed no sign of annoyance. She chatted gaily with Sir Frederick, who was taking care of her, and was apparently utterly oblivious of Mr. Hainton's presence ; but Miss Clothele knew her friend too well not to know that she would be bitterly stung by such desertion. Protest as she might, Ethel knew that Maude's feelings were much more involved than she could ever be brought to confess, and in the fulness of her indignation she determined upon making John Hainton rue his supposed faithlessness if it were within her power. How was she to dream of the delicate innuendoes by which the man's jealousy had been aroused and the girl's modesty alarmed ; how guess, that two people sincerely attached

to each other, were making themselves miserable at the malicious instigation of a woman they both disliked. Lovers from time immemorial have always shown much dexterity in the mismanagement of their affairs, but that Ethel should unwittingly set herself to abet Caroline Mangerston in promoting an estrangement between this unfortunate pair, was a piece of bad fortune that could hardly be counted on.

When Miss Clothele met Hainton in the ball-room, after supper, the Miss Mephistophiles of the little drama was fairly taken aback. If there was one thing Caroline Mangerston felt she could count upon, it was that the Squire of Enderly would meet with a chilling reception. Quite the contrary: Ethel received him with the greatest *empressement*, she ruthlessly threw over a favourite partner to give him a valse,

and there could be no doubt about it, went off, at score, into an incipient flirtation with John Hainton. He was no fool ; but where is the man who, played false by his lady-love, would throw away such a chance of retaliation. Who, when a strikingly handsome girl, an acknowledged beauty of the London world, threw herself at his head, and that, too, in the presence of the woman who had slighted him, would have the resolution not to respond to so fair a challenge. No man, whose pulses beat strong in his veins, but must have accepted the glove thus thrown down to him. Miss Mangerston, surprised as she had been at first, speedily read the riddle aright. That mischievous young woman laughed in her sleeve, as she saw how everything combined to play her game for her. Ethel, seeking to avenge her friend by bringing Hainton

beneath her own yoke, was widening the breach between him and Maude. For a moment Miss Mangerston felt that she must call Miss Riversley's attention to her renegade lover, but a glance sufficed to show that was quite unnecessary. Women, on these occasions, number as many eyes as there are in a peacock's tail, and can see through the backs of their heads with marvellous clearness. The shrewd Caroline looked with much satisfaction at the result of her evening's work, as she watched Ethel flirting furiously with Hainton, and Maude giving the utmost encouragement to Sir Frederick, and felt that the two girls were both bent upon the discomfiture of the Squire of Enderly, who had committed the unpardonable offence of once forgetting that he had been engaged to valse with her, Caroline Mangerston.

One other also looked on at these proceedings with mute amazement, and that was Ralph Leslie. He knew both girls well, and loved them, though not precisely in similar fashion. He would have pledged his life that neither of them were a coquette, and yet, here they were both embarked in reckless flirtations, which he felt certain contained no particle of reality in them. Were they bitten by the tarantula of coquetry, and impelled to plunge into it as the heroine of the Spanish legend was to whirl pirouettes and compass demi-voltes. The Colonel was completely puzzled. He believed thoroughly in the honesty and purity of good women ; had never read, and would never have subscribed to Diderot's scathing analysis of the sex.

“Impenetrable in dissimulation, cruel in vengeance, tenacious in their designs,

without scruples about the means of success, animated by a deep and secret hatred against the despotism of man, it seems as if there were among them a sort of league, such as exists among the priests of all nations."

There may be a good bit of truth in all this, but it is not a pleasant belief to go through the world with.

CHAPTER XI.

ARTHUR'S EMBASSY.

WHEN John Hainton awoke the next morning, it was with no jubilant recollections of conquest. He could recollect, it was true, a slight pressure of the hand and a soft glance of farewell from the heiress, but what were these against Maude's haughty bend in the cloak-room. The glamour of the lights, music, and the salve to his wounded vanity, might intoxicate him for the moment, but he was far too clear-headed, strong-minded a man, to impose upon himself the next day. He knew very well, that handsome as she was, he cared nothing about Ethel, and he made no dis-

guise to himself that he did care a very great deal about Maude—and—well he supposed he was mistaken, but he had thought she fancied him a little, at all events.

And now she was going to marry that sallow-faced cousin of hers—d—n him—and the latter ejaculation escaped John Hainton's lips with a fervour that would have been edifying to listen to, had a blessing been invoked. What should he do? how had he got all wrong with Miss Riversley? Bah! the explanation was simple; during his absence there had turned up the probability of becoming "my lady," and the wife to a man whose income about equalled his own. Did not everybody, that is in London, tell him that it was so; does not all fiction dwell upon the time-honoured topic, although oftentimes putting things right at the finish, in order to enlist the sympathies

of the reader. Of course, girls married for position now-a-days, and, if the bargain was not clenched, how could you blame them if they sealed and signed with a better opportunity on its being offered. He would call and upbraid her with her perfidy, and then he ruefully thought of last night's proceedings, and became dimly conscious that he might get the worst of such argument. No, he would be off at once ; go to Ireland or Iceland, or some other country, not popular with tourists, and forget her. Much given to crude belief in absence as a curative process, some of these sore-stricken ones, and in one sense it is wont to prove a success, even should they fail to forget they can always look forward hopefully to being forgotten, and that, at all events, should prove an anodyne.

And how, in the meantime, was it with

Maude ? She vowed to herself that she never wished to see John Hainton again—that he had behaved with shameful discourtesy, to say the least of it ; that he was nothing to her ; but, if it was so, why did she feel so utterly miserable, discontented with herself, and wonder how Ethel could go on in the way she did ? Then her face flushed and her brow clouded, as she thought of how warmly her cousin had responded to the encouragement she had given him last night. Yes, she knew the challenge to flirtation that she had thrown out, from motives of jealousy, had been met more than half way by Sir Frederick, and a vague idea dawned across her mind, that she should be involved in trouble concerning that misapprehension. Our dull masculine understandings rarely take in the why of a young woman, making herself out-of-the-way agreeable to us. It

may be to annoy, and very often is, somebody else ; it may be, if we've made some mark in the world, to gratify her vanity, by showing that our scalp also may decorate her girdle if she pleases ; it may be from caprice ; it may be from *ennui* ; it may be because she dreads being seen sitting out a dance by herself ; but it very rarely is from any particular admiration of ourselves. " If we have more reason than women have, they have far more instinct than we have," quoth the French philosopher, and we are a long way off comprehending the motives that sway their proceedings for the most part.

Nor was Ethel Clothele altogether satisfied with her last night's work. She, as haughty a girl as ever breathed, knew that she had in some measure stooped to solicit a man's love—a man who, far from having

won her esteem even, had incurred her bitterest contempt. She faltered not an iota in her scheme of vengeance; but she was fain to confess that she would have to tread the dirty paths of simulation and hypocrisy to compass her design. And further, it was not quite clear to her that she should not occasion an estrangement from her great friend, Maude Riversley: temporary, of course; and yet Ethel, if she had thought it over deeply, might have remembered that her sex, from days "lang syne," had ill brooked interference from their compeers with what they regarded as their own belongings. A woman may be quite tired of a lover, but, at the same time, fiercely resent his appropriation by another. Her captive may have escaped her thrall, and she be careless of the fact; but she never believes that it is not within

her power to reassert her sway, and is apt to view any attempt of her sisters to subjugate the wanderer as a species of poaching on her manor. A girl like Maude, veritably in love, I think would prefer the punishment of the culprit left to herself, but, at all events, would hardly listen to Ethel's scheme with complacency.

As for Miss Mangerston, she, to speak figuratively, kept throwing sixes all through the evening. Everything fell out beyond her possible expectations. She had thoroughly detached Maude and John Hainton, and had, at all events, laid the foundation of a permanent estrangement between the former and Ethel. Looking back upon what she had already achieved, the conclusion of the drama seemed to Caroline Mangerston easy of accomplishment. Once put close friends into discor-

dant keys, and it were ludicrous, if it were not painful, to think how easily a mischievous tongue can rend an old attachment.

“ Alas ! they had been friends in youth ;
But whispering tongues will poison truth.”

Do not the fights of our childhood begin in this wise ? and does not John Nokes seek to try conclusions with Tommy Stokes, because malignant tongues whisper into his ear that Stokes has expressed his ability to punch his, Nokes', head whenever it shall so please him ?

Miss Clothele's party upon the whole can hardly be said to have been fraught with pleasure to herself and her most intimate friend.

But that Sir Frederick, as he emerged from his bath next morning — man is usually personally reflective at that time —

should have, not fairy visions, for he was long past that, but sanguine hopes, is not much to be wondered at.

Maude had never been so kind to him as yet; and, as I said before, we do not always comprehend why it pleaseth the "Queen of Beauty" to bestow her glove upon us. The arguments he had used to Arthur were sound, and there could be no denying that Sir Frederick, aged about five-and-thirty, and with five thousand a year of his own, had good right to regard himself as an eligible *parti* for a young lady in Maude's position. He determined to strike while the iron was hot, and thought, as he brushed his hair, that Arthur should receive his instructions to act as ambassador at once.

Why did a cynical man, with a keen money-making eye, desire to wed a por-

tionless maiden?—and Maude's dowry was scarce likely to be more than modest.

Cynic though he might be, the baronet felt that there should be somebody to come after him and inherit the title and estates. Lustful of money he might be, but yet he was no miser; keen to acquire it, keener still to get the worth of every sovereign he spent—with, if possible, a trifle to boot; but he did not shrink from the outlay of the sovereign. He started by looking for a wife with money, and found himself hawked at for his own. A little bored by conventional London young ladies on promotion, who persistently talked the jargon of the season to a man who had not as yet time to pick up the threads of it, Sir Frederick suddenly came across his cousin Maude. He made up his mind quickly. She was a very pretty sensible girl, and, if she brought no

money, she had not been accustomed to extravagant expenditure. If he could have her for his wife he would. He was not in love with her. I don't say that his day for love was gone by, because till the grave has closed over him it is impossible to say of any man that his day for that, or its fac simile, infatuation, is finished. The whimsies of dotage are as manifold as sad. But Sir Frederick was very much in earnest, and with his experiences, that was perhaps as much as you could expect of him now. You may, as a general rule, rely upon it, that a man who is a confirmed gambler has slender capacity for real love—capacity for great self-sacrifice occasionally. I can thoroughly believe in Bret Harte's story of "The Outcasts of Poker Flat," though not in that of John Hamlin's love affair.

Whatever he might have been in his early

days, Sir Frederick was no sluggard in the morning now. Whatever hours he might keep at night, ten saw him at the breakfast table in this period of his prosperity, and Arthur Riversley was aroused from his slumbers a little after eleven, with an intimation that his cousin was in the sitting-room, and waiting to see him.

"What the devil does he want?" muttered Arthur, in momentary oblivion of their secret contract.

Although he had been present at Miss Clothele's dance the night previous, he had left before supper to fulfil another engagement, and was consequently in complete ignorance of Hainton's reappearance and the further events of the evening; very possible he would have comprehended little of what was going on had he remained.

Men do overlook their sisters' love affairs

in most surprising fashion, albeit the sisters seldom overlook their brothers' if they come within their ken. Arthur plunged into his bath, slipped into his dressing-gown, and then proceeded to give his cousin an audience, what he was wanted for dawning upon him as he indulged in the first salutary operation. He felt a little nervous about opening this matter to his sister, for, plausible as Sir Frederick might look in the eyes of the world as a suitor, he had a strong inward conviction that he would not be quite acceptable to Maude. He was, after his fashion, very fond of his eldest sister, and would have been loth to persuade her to anything that he did not deem conducive to her happiness; but a season in London rather breeds contempt for anything but well-arranged marriages. And then he was urgently in want of two thousand

pounds, or thereabouts ; and again, he had already accepted a retainer for the plaintiff.

Sir Frederick's directions were clear, concise, and strictly to the point. He expected Arthur to break his intentions to Maude, using every argument in his, Sir Frederick's, favour that he could bring to mind, and then to talk to the Rev. Mortimer and his wife upon the subject.

"I don't suppose, Arthur, that your sister is very much in love with me—I can't expect that ; but she was very pleasant and sociable last night—quite as much so as a man who has not definitely declared himself has a right to expect, except in a regular case of 'spoon.' She will make a very charming wife, and I can give her a position she is thoroughly fitted for. We shall understand each other better later on, no doubt. In the meantime, your mission is to break

ground for me without delay, and I am quite ready to advance formal proposals as soon as you report the way cleared for me. Good-bye ; I shall expect to hear from you this evening, and if your duns really are troublesome, the sooner things are settled, the better for you."

Arthur Riversley, as he meditated on his task after his cousin's departure, did not feel particularly comfortable concerning it. He was endowed with one of those soft, sensuous natures that instinctively shrink from everything that threatens to be arduous or unpleasant—not deficient in animal courage in the least, nor even in moral courage when driven to the wall. Like the rat in the corner, they will fight hard then ; but it is not till they are actually in the corner that such men ever show they have grit in them. He did not like what was before him, but he

felt it was imperative upon him to urge his cousin's proposal upon Maude with all the ability in his power. Speciously as he might disguise it to himself, he still knew at the bottom of his heart that he was about to endeavour to persuade his sister to pay his debts by consenting to this marriage. He had been weak, vain, extravagant, but he had not yet arrived at that state of supreme selfishness when man feels no compunctions at demanding sacrifices from friends or relations, and very little gratitude for such immolation.

He sauntered slowly down to Curzon Street about luncheon-time. He knew that if he found his sister at home, he could depend upon having her to himself for half-an-hour after that meal in the dining-room. After last night's revel, he thought, she would probably be there. He was perfectly

right in his conjecture ; but it was impossible to overlook Maude's jaded appearance. The girl looked tired, worn out, fagged to death—she, too, who could dance all Clumford down, and look fresh as a rose at the breakfast-table next morning.

“ This won't do, mother,” said Arthur, after greeting her formally ; “ you'll have to get back to Clumbershire before worse comes of it. Why, here's Maudie lost all her country bloom, and looking as played out as the veteran of a dozen seasons.”

“ Don't talk nonsense, Arthur,” replied the young lady. “ I danced perhaps a little too much, stayed perhaps a little too late, and own to not feeling up to much to-day. But you weren't kept on escort duty, remember.”

“ No,” replied her brother, gently. “ It would have been better, perhaps, if I had

been, and warned you to come home sooner. Don't get touchy, I am honestly sorry to see you look as if you had had a little too much of it."

The girl smiled faintly as she replied, "I'm afraid you're right, Arthur, and I a little overdid it last night."

"Ah, I shall expect you to take considerably more care of me next season, when I make my debut," said Miss Bessie.

"And discover how seldom brothers are to be depended upon for such services. You, too, Miss Untameable, why it would take a strong eleven to look after you when you get your innings."

"And don't fret yourself but what I shall have them," replied Bessie, saucily :

"For oh ! Maggie's lovers came trooping
Gallantly over the lea,
Prancing and liting and whooping,
Their ain bonnie Maggie to see."

and concluding the above stanza with a light laugh, and sweeping Arthur a mock courtesy, Miss Bessie danced out of the room. A few minutes more and Maude and her brother were left alone.

"I'm afraid you didn't like your evening, last night," said Arthur; "which is hard, because, if it was not pleasant to yourself, you undoubtedly made it very pleasant to somebody else."

"What do you mean?" inquired Miss Riversley.

"Simply, that I have come here to-day as an ambassador. I bring you an offer of marriage."

"From whom?" exclaimed Maude, in a low voice.

"From a most eligible candidate, one who in a social position is unimpeachable. I don't think any man half good enough for

you, Maude, but, practically, I doubt whether you may ever have the chance to do better."

"Who is he?" asked the girl, with feverish anxiety. She was yet clinging to the hope that, despite all appearances, John Hainton might have deputed her brother to break the ice for him.

"Your cousin, Sir Frederick," returned Arthur, quietly, and he watched his sister, narrowly, to see how she took the announcement.

"Frederick! why, I haven't known him six weeks."

"That matters little. Men often make their minds up rapidly on these points. He knows that he labours under all the disadvantages of a short acquaintance, which is one reason why I am speaking to you instead of himself."

"I knew that he had lived abroad, but I

did not conceive that he had become so oriental in his habits as to deem he had only to throw his handkerchief," rejoined Maude, sharply.

"Don't talk nonsense," said Arthur, "men fall in love and propose quickly when they really mean it, for fear some other fellow should be shoving his oar in; besides, Fred seemed to think he had received reasonable encouragement."

Last night's dance flashed across Maude, and she coloured to the roots of her hair, as she recalled all those after-supper cross-purposes. It was too true; for ends of her own she had smiled very sweetly on the baronet—there was no denying it; but she did not mean to marry him.

"Ah, well," she said at length, "I plead guilty to a ball-room flirtation, no more, and you must explain that to him, Arthur. He

ought to know the London world well enough to understand that we don't pledge ourselves to accept the men we give half the after-supper dances to, and sit out on the stairs with, as partners for life. You know what to say—'Profoundly impressed with honour he's done me, trust we shall be good friends, as cousins, &c.'"

"But I think I had better not give your message just yet. Consider, Maude, 'Lady Riversley,' with a fair income, can easily be somebody in the London world."

"Very likely, but I don't wish to marry Fred. I don't particularly dislike him; I don't care about him, either one way or the other."

"Pray think over it. Fred's a match a good many girls in your shoes would jump at. He's better than Hainton would be, for instance."


"How dare you drag Mr. Hainton's name

into the matter," cried Maude, with flaming cheeks, as she sprang from her chair. "What is he to me? and why should you suppose there was ever anything between us?"

"Well, I am afraid we all fell into the same mistake as Fred, and thought that a big share of the after-supper dances and interminable sittings out on the stairs augured affinities," replied Arthur, drily. "Fred thinks you have given him encouragement. We thought you had done that to Hainton."

"Then all I can say is, I wish you would not trouble your head about my affairs, but confine your speculations to your own."

"Don't be cross, Maude. I assure you thinking over my own troubles is the most unsatisfactory way of spending a morning I know of. I wish to Heaven you could like Frederick, and if you don't care about Hain—— I mean about anybody else, I



can't see why you should not. It is a most eligible offer, you must admit."

Miss Riversley turned her head quickly as she said, "And in what will this marriage benefit you?"

"I never said it would do so," returned Arthur, with some little embarrassment.

"I know you did not, but I fancy, my brother, you have some interest in being Sir Frederick's advocate, and I mean to know what it is. Tell me or not, as you like, but never think a woman will fail to discover a thing of that sort when she has once suspected it."

"I don't see that it would be against such a marriage, that it benefited me," returned Arthur, doggedly; "but I am merely pointing out what every one else will tell you, namely, that Frederick is a good *parti* for you."

“Quite so, and if it does good to you, so much the better. I am only curious, to know, Arthur, how much it concerns you.”

“In this wise, as you insist upon knowing ; Fred promises to be a much better brother-in-law to me than he does cousin. Still, Maude, I would not advocate his suit for a moment if I did not honestly believe that he was a good match for you.”

“As a paid advocate,” retorted the girl, bitterly, “you could say no less. Tell your principal that the honour is respectfully declined.”

“I can’t give Frederick such a message as that, quite,” replied the young man, diplomatically. “You must soften it a little, Maude.”

“How can I? I have no other answer to give than ‘No.’ I authorise you to wrap it in silver paper, at your own discretion.”

“Thank you, that is good of you. I can’t afford a rupture with Fred, just now. You will allow me to say that you will give him an answer in two or three days—that you are taken by surprise, never thought of him in that light, &c.”

“Absurd, Arthur; that is holding out hopes which you know I have no intention of realizing. He deserves straightforward treatment. Give him my answer, civilly couched.”

“I shall, but you have empowered me to judge how that is to be done, and I prefer to do as I have said. Do not be afraid that I will commit you.”

“You will, if you don’t make him understand that his suit is hopeless. I was foolish not to keep the matter in my own hands, and refuse you my permission to convey more than a polite negative. You cannot expect

me to purchase you Frederick's good offices at the price of my life's happiness," said Maude, rising.

"I have given up expecting anything to my benefit for some months past," replied her brother, gravely. "Girls in our world, as you know, don't invariably marry for love ; and I have simply advocated the claims of an extremely eligible candidate for your hand. I don't see why you should rush into high-flown language about my demanding the sacrifice of your life's happiness. I only ask you to let me say to him, ' No,' gently."

"I'll argue with you no more," cried Maude, hotly. "I know I'm right in the main, cleverly as you gloze it over. But remember my 'No' is spoken in earnest," and, so saying, she swept from the room.

Arthur leisurely picked up his hat and gloves, and sauntered out into the street.

He was not altogether dissatisfied with his morning's work. He had never expected that his sister would accede to Sir Frederick's proposal, in the first instance, and rightly judged that the temporizing answer he had obtained permission to deliver, was a point in his favour. It gave time to bring parental pressure to bear, and the urging of various other inducements conducive to the result he would fain bring about. Maude must be made to say "Yes," for were not his pecuniary difficulties becoming more imperative day by day?

CHAPTER XII.

DIPLOMATIC DOINGS.

ALTHOUGH John Hainton in the first moment of his disappointment might meditate leaving London, with a view to forgetting the cause of his trouble, yet it is needless to say that he speedily re-considered this determination. He would, at all events, see Maude once more, and learn from her own lips in what way he had incurred her displeasure. Girls took fancies at times, he knew ; unless the world was right, and that in this case the fancy was for another, a good understanding might be still come to between them : anyway it was easy to learn from the family if Sir Frederick was an accepted

suitor. Imbued with these ideas he wended his way to Curzon Street. Mrs. Riversley *was* at home, and he was speedily ushered into her drawing-room.

“Welcome back again, Mr. Hainton; Maude told us the other night that you had returned from your mysterious wanderings; we are all dying of curiosity to know where you have been, and WHY you have been away.”

“I have been to America, you must know, on very urgent business, which I luckily brought to a fortunate conclusion; but where is Miss Riversley? I had no opportunity of talking to her at Miss Clothele’s dance, and I am anxious to give her some account of my adventures.”

Mrs. Riversley touched the bell, and desired the servant who answered her summons to let Miss Riversley know that Mr.

Hainton was in the drawing-room. He returned with an intimation that Miss Riversley was suffering from a bad headache, and begged Mr. Hainton would excuse her.

John Hainton drew his own deductions ; he knew what headaches meant in society, and felt that this was a polite "Not-at-home" as far as he was concerned.

"I had hoped," he observed, "to offer my congratulations in person. I presume what I hear everywhere is true, and that Miss Riversley is about to become Lady Riversley."

It was with a smile of exultation that the matron replied, It was only the day before that she had learnt from Arthur of Sir Frederick's proposals, and heard also that Maude had consented to postpone her negative for a day or two. "You know the

London world, Mr. Hainton," she said, "it always will talk, but I can assure you we have made no announcement of that kind even to our intimates."

And even as she spoke, the elation visible on her face told John Hainton that, although it might not be as yet announced to the world, yet the engagement was at least in contemplation. The good lady, indeed, was not sorry to be able to flourish such pact in his face. She held strenuously, like many of Maude's friends, that he had no business to rush abroad without having asked the question that was to be expected of him.

"I must not be indiscreet," he replied, "but trust as an old friend to have early intelligence when you do publish it."

Some little more desultory conversation, and then John Hainton took his leave, amply avenged, as the street-door slammed behind

him, if he but knew it. That sound sent a pang of bitter regret through Maude's bosom as she heard it. She felt that she had refused an opportunity for explanation, and it might be the sole opportunity that would ever be vouchsafed her for hearing if Hainton had anything to say in extenuation of his abrupt departure from England, and of discovering whether his feelings remained unchanged towards her. Then she thought passionately, that after that evening at Prince's Gate, there could be little doubt but what Caroline Mangerston was right in her conclusions.

The girl's mind was in a whirl of contending emotions, now believing in her lover's good faith, and then convinced by what her own eyes had seen, and others had told her. Her instinct told her rightly, that the interview she had just shrunk from

would have probably made things clear ; and yet from pique she had positively declined it. She felt, too, that she had been guilty of imprudence in allowing Arthur's specious pleading to prevail upon her. She ought to have insisted that Sir Frederick should have his answer at once. It was absurd, softening her refusal by pretending to think over it. Her mind was made up, and the sooner her cousin was made aware of it the better. Conducted as Arthur proposed, Sir Frederick would have fair grounds for expecting an affirmative. Though she was resolute in her determination that it never should be, yet she reflected that girls before now have been drawn into awkward entanglements by such irresolute replies. Well ! things were out of her guidance now, and she could simply insist that Arthur at the end of forty-eight hours should be very clear and definite

about the answer of which he was the bearer.

John Hainton strolled away from Curzon Street, taking the intelligence he had acquired with no little acerbity; he had no thought now of going abroad. It was all true; and the Club smoking-rooms spoke rightly. It was the old story; girls were all alike, and invariably selected the biggest strawberry to be found in the basket. Well! he was not going to break his heart about it. Better far to take the goods the gods provide, and prosecute his flirtation with handsome Ethel Clothele. There was a good month left yet in which to sip the sweets of the season, and he would make the most of it. Henceforth there should be no gayer man in London than John Hainton.

The consequence of all these social forces was inevitable. Ethel, pursuing her flirta-

tion and scheme of vengeance, naturally drifted wider and wider apart from her friend. It was sure to be so. Maude, of course, shrank from meeting Hainton, and it was now not easy to be much in Miss Clothele's society without encountering that gentleman. Even the London world began at last to deem the heiress's hour was come, and that she who might have aspired to a coronet was about to content herself with a plain country gentleman.

"Lamentable, my dear," exclaimed Lady Crackemthorpe, "a fair match enough, I grant you, for most girls; but that Ethel Clothele, with her chances, should take up with a mere country squire, is the most shocking instance of neglected opportunities that I ever remember to have witnessed."

Miss Mangerston, it need be scarcely said, did her utmost to harden Ethel in her

scheme of retribution. It was all so easy for the fair Caroline, now. She, naturally, saw but little of Maude, compared to what she had done ; but she made the most of those few occasions upon which they did meet, and never failed to enlarge upon Hainton's devotion to the heiress. There was small need, however, for her to carry such news to Maude. There were plenty of people to comment upon that, and who spoke openly of it as one of *the* arranged matches of the season ; and, to say the truth, Maude most thoroughly believed them. Puzzled as she was by her friend's sudden caprice, the old faith in her was too strong to let her believe that Ethel was only amusing herself. She would not believe that the proud straightforward Ethel Clothele could be giving a man such marked encouragement as she was bestowing upon

John Hainton, unless she purposed giving him her hand when he should feel emboldened to claim it. Unless, indeed, Caroline Mangerston was right, and Hainton was one of those who made love to every pretty girl he came across.

“Then, again,” she argued, “my case and Ethel’s are very different. My hand was no great catch, except a man loved me; but Ethel, with her wealth and beauty, is a prize to be snatched at.” And then she thought again: “And yet Frederick, who has greater advantages to offer his bride than John Hainton has, at all events deemed me worth the wooing.”

If there was one thing that impressed itself on Maude’s mind at this time, it was how well Sir Frederick bore his disappointment. He still continued frequently to visit in Curzon Street, and if he carried himself

somewhat as an accepted suitor, it was with this difference, he never once by word or manner gave Maude herself the slightest reason to believe that he considered himself so. She inquired of Arthur if he had given her reply to her cousin, and that gentleman replied jesuitically that Sir Frederick had had his answer ; but the fact was, that Arthur Riversley was too desperately embarrassed to put an end to such an opportunity of extrication as would occur to him in the event of Sir Frederick's marriage with his sister. The bribe that his cousin had dangled before his eyes was too great a temptation to be withstood. He certainly had given Sir Frederick her reply, but it had been by no means such as the girl had dictated to him ; he had told the baronet that Maude was taken by surprise, that she could not make her mind up at present, that

if he asked for a positive Yes or No at the present moment there could be very little doubt about his being refused. He exhorted him to have a little patience. "A few weeks longer, and I will undertake to say it will be as you wish."

"You see," he said, "Maude is not quite a conventional society young lady ; she will not take you just because you happen to be a good match, unless she honestly thinks that she could make you a good wife. She is not as yet in love with you. Indeed, considering the short time you have known each other, it is hardly to be expected that she should be."

"It's very possible," answered the baronet, "that she may never be so. Many marriages that turn out very well start from no more than a mutual liking, while we have all seen love matches end in the

Divorce Court. I am quite content to take her without overmuch protestation on her part, if she will only say me 'Yes.'"

And so, thanks to Arthur's duplicity, Maude and Sir Frederick were, in some measure, playing at cross purposes. While the lady thought that he thoroughly understood that the honour of his hand had been declined, and was admiring the tact and good humour with which he had bowed to his fate, and subsided into a cousinly position, the baronet was regarding himself as merely on probation; not, certainly, an accepted suitor, but thoroughly entitled to hope shortly to become so. All this was naturally calculated to make Maude look with a favourable eye on her would-be lover. Then, again, her mother was continually urging upon her how foolish she would be to reject such an eligible opportunity of establishing

herself. That any explanation now could ever take place between herself and Hainton seemed to Maude an impossibility. Even if he could have explained his abrupt departure from England, still how could he possibly justify his neglect of her, and his open devotion to Ethel Clothele? No! she was more likely to hear their engagement formally announced than that John Hainton should seek to exonerate himself in her eyes.

It was now some three weeks since Arthur had first communicated the baronet's proposals to her. He lounged in one day at luncheon-time, as was his wont when he wanted to have a confidential talk with his sister. He waited till the conclusion of the meal, and when they at length had the room to themselves, said—

“I want to have a real talk with you, Maude. I am in a very serious mess, and it

happens to rest with you to get me out of it."

"With me!" she exclaimed. "It is nothing worse, surely, than these miserable debts."

"Nothing worse, indeed! If you were only dunned with the persistency that I am, I fancy that you would think that nothing could be much worse."

"But what can I do to help you in this case? I cannot pay them for you, you know. I have already recommended you to make a clean breast of it to papa. You will have to, believe me, sooner or later; and oh, Arthur, what is the use of postponing the evil day? He may scold—indeed, I have no doubt he will—but he will set you straight with the world. You cannot expect him to be anything but angry at having to pay so much money for you."

“That fathers should growl when they have to pay their sons’ debts, is an immutable law of nature,” he rejoined, grimly. “It is the privilege of the man with money, and the penalty of the man without ; but I don’t see the necessity of my enduring the torments on this occasion. If you could but be a sensible girl, Maude, my debts would be easily settled without having recourse to my father.”

“A sensible girl ? What can you mean ? You are speaking in riddles.”

“I mean this,” he returned, sullenly, “that my brother-in-law would pay my debts, without question.”

“And this, then, was how Sir Frederick’s proposition was to benefit you—the payment of these miserable liabilities was the price of your advocacy. Arthur ! Arthur I did think better of you than this. I

did think my happiness would have weighed more with you than escape from your entanglements."

"And you have no right to say still that it does not. I'll admit, if you like, that I am paid to plead Frederick's cause. Put that on one side, and I could still most conscientiously do so. Why can you not accept him? I'll not go over the old ground again, but you know he offers an excellent home, and is suitable in every way."

"I do not love him," she replied, curtly.

"Perhaps not—but, believe me, the generality of people don't marry for love now-a-days. You like him, and the love will come afterwards. He is not in his first youth, and he's got over the romantic epoch of life."

She looked at him for a moment with an arch smile, and then said,—

“My poor Arthur! I shall hardly look to learning the philosophy of life from your teaching.”

“But,” he continued, “the world has already given you to him; people talk about your engagement as a settled fact; and even Fred himself half thinks that it will be so.”

There was very little archness in her face now. It was with set brows that she asked quickly,—

“Did you give him my answer? Did you explain to him that it never could be?”

“I told him that he was not likely to get a favourable hearing under present circumstances. But listen to me, Maude—if he does not get an affirmative before the week is out, I am ruined! I shall either be in jail, or must fly the country. I bid fair,” he continued, bitterly, “to take up Fred’s life

abroad where he laid it down, to become a vagrant over the Continent on such pittance as it may please the Rev. Mortimer Riversley to vouchsafe me. George Latimer's will must have been invented solely for my undoing. It has been the cause of all my embarrassments. If it had not been for that, I should never have been in the scrape I am."

Not quite a true rendering of the case. The distant prospect of inheriting the Latimer estates had no doubt fostered the inherent extravagance of Arthur Riversley ; and, while that visionary prospect remained to him, there was no doubt but what Society had combined to persuade him that he was heir to a largish property ; but, in reality, he had principally only his own weakness to thank for the position in which he found himself.

“And you expect me to save you by sacrificing myself.”

“I cannot see any sacrifice about it,” he returned.

“Arthur, you have behaved infamously—you have deceived me, you have deceived your cousin, and you now wind up by deceiving yourself. Since I find it is useless to trust to you, I will explain matters to Fred myself. He will doubtless be no more obliged to you than I am for the duplicity with which you have treated us.”

As far as the baronet was concerned, he was not much deceived as to the position in which he stood ; Arthur had been far clearer with him than he dared be with his sister, and he was a great deal too shrewd a man not to guess that, though Arthur, in his own interests, might palliate his account of things, his suit had met with

most decided disapprobation. But then he was thoroughly in earnest—and his old gambling instincts and cynical knowledge of mankind stood him in good stead now. He knew that the woman who can be persuaded not to give a decided “No,” is still to be won. He rather preferred a *rusé* game to a straightforward one; it came more natural to him to obtain his desires rather by intrigue than in direct fashion. He meant to marry Maude; but that her consent was only to be obtained by some little *finesse* and subterfuge, amused him rather than otherwise. He neither expected nor wished that she should be in love with him. He wanted a wife as an end to an heir. Now he had come into the title, and had become a man of landed estates, he felt anxious that there should be a child of his own to succeed him. He could, at all events, depend upon himself not to squander the Latimer

lands, as his own father had done Bunning-on. He looked in a wife for a pretty lady-like woman, who would be a companion to him, and who was not saturated with the conventional jargon of society. The London society of the present day, with that flavour of fastness, so extremely popular just now with a large section of it, was vapid in the extreme to a man who had spent years in the country of Bohemia. What was gambling in hundreds compared to gambling for your dinner? He had played with his honour depending upon the dexterity of his fingers, when clumsiness meant exposure, and when one was but too happy if a dispute could be settled by the arbitration of the pistol. Society in London, in short, was to him but as "the lilies and languors of virtue," as compared with "the raptures and roses of vice." In fact, when

you have learned to drink neat brandy, amontillado is flavourless and insipid.

Having devoted the spring-time of life to revel and extravagance, its early summer to shifts, expedients and practices not good to look back upon, he resolved to devote its noontide to money-making and respectability. To turn water-drinker is certainly the greatest change an habituated inebriate can arrive at. I don't go so far as to say that Sir Frederick intended to fly from the nadir of vice to the zenith of austerity, but he had come to the determination, to what our French neighbours term *rangé* himself. Whether dabbling on the turf and the Stock Exchange, by way of money-making, was likely to be as conducive to the acquisition of riches, as his marriage with Maude to the acquirement of respectability and domestic virtues, time only can determine.

CHAPTER XIII.

LADY RIVERSLEY.

It would, I think, astound most of us to find how much those habitually about us know regarding our affairs; take servants, for instance: they are aware of intimacies which we thought utterly without their knowledge; they know of unpaid bills, the non-settlement of which occasions us considerable annoyance, by reason of our creditors' importunities. They do not, to the best of our belief, read our letters, but they seem intuitively to know whence they come and what are their contents. You have some ugly secret, which you have carefully hidden from your best and truest

friend. Dear me ! He has known all about it these last ten years, and you might have eased your mind many times, by talking the business over with him, without the pain of confession. This being so habitually the case with our surroundings, it need scarcely be said that Sir Frederick's matrimonial project was not likely to escape a man holding the confidential position of Solano ; and that gentleman pondered somewhat seriously as to how this would affect his own interests. He certainly had no desire to see the baronet under the dominion of a woman. He could influence him at present, to a limited extent, and trusted, in course of time, to considerably strengthen such hold as he had upon him. He shrewdly conjectured that there were circumstances in Fred Riversley's former career, which that gentleman would not

wish to see the light of day. We most of us commit follies in our youth, and more especially when we accomplish as complete a smash as the baronet had formerly achieved. If he could but find a clue to this Marion Gardiner, for whom Sir Frederick had told him to make such diligent search, and the giving of which commission he seemed to have repented with almost equal celerity, he had little doubt but that he should acquire a grip of some sort. A woman mixed up in a man's early life, and about whose whereabouts, years later, he becomes solicitous, has, it may be fairly assumed, claims upon him which he is either anxious to evade or to compromise. Solano, in spite of his employer's intimation that he might abandon the search, had pursued it with the utmost pertinacity. Vainly, so far ! but Solano was as dogged and untiring as a hungry

wolf in quest of prey when on the track of a secret of such description as he conceived might possibly be connected with Marion Gardiner.

He argued with himself, and with considerable acuteness, that Sir Frederick, once married, whatever relations he might have held with this woman, in bygone days, the discovery could not so much affect him as when it contained the possibility of preventing his marriage altogether. Still, he felt that it would be useless to oppose the contemplated arrangement. It might not, after all, take place, and, although he determined to neglect no opportunity that might arise to, if possible, prevent it, he resolved to be a mere looker-on as things were at present. More clear to him than ever now, that he must trace out Marion Gardiner.

Miss Clothele's flirtation with John Hainton, as I before said, attracted much attention in society, and by no two men was it viewed with more disfavour than by Lord Lithfield and Ralph Leslie. Ethel, perfectly unintentionally, had called the Viscount's attention sharply to the fact that he had drifted tranquilly into love, and he now regarded Hainton with unmitigated disgust as a man striving to rob him of his chosen bride. It need scarcely be said that he had no grounds whatever for taking this view of the situation. He had paid court to Ethel in the usual languid manner with which he habitually pursued most pretty women he came across,—though she undoubtedly was entitled to number him amongst the band of her admirers, yet he had never spoken words that gave him claim to occupy any higher position than that. It is

very often the case that men do not awake to a woman's charms until they find another anxiously contending for their possession. It was not till he thought that Ethel was in a fair way to become Hainton's wife that Lithfield suddenly discovered that he wanted her as his own. In short, the Viscount was suffering from a tolerably sharp attack of jealousy.

With Ralph Leslie the case was different. He never had any doubt about his own feelings, although he had never ventured to express them. He knew, and had known for a long time, that he loved Ethel Clothele passionately. He had no intention of declaring that love. What had he, a battered old soldier, to offer a girl like Ethel? What right had he, at his age, to suppose for one instant that he could win a beauty and an heiress for his bride? He disliked the idea

of her marrying Hainton, not from any dislike of Hainton himself, but the idea of her marrying at all was extremely distasteful to him. Hainton, he thought, in his heart, by no means a bad fellow. Not good enough, of course, for Ethel Clothele, but, then, who was ? And so, with that magnificent disregard of all practical considerations so eminently characteristic of a man smitten with love's fitful fever, he deemed that Ethel ought to be left to the admiration of her worshippers generally, and not to become the property of any one of them individually.

Maude adhered to the firm determination she had expressed to Arthur, and rapidly realised that her anticipations of difficulty about extricating herself from the meshes in which his double dealing had involved her were only too true. Sir Frederick, of course, had heard

from Arthur that Maude intended to have an explanation with him, and to make him clearly understand that no engagement was possible between them, and this, most assuredly, was what Maude intended should be the result of that interview.

“It was no fault of mine, Frederick,” she said to him, “that you were not definitely told; when you first did me the honour to ask my hand, that it could not be. It was most unfortunate that you did not ask the question of myself. An ambassador is never to be quite trusted to tell the truth clearly, especially as when, in Arthur’s case——” and here she stopped abruptly, as she remembered how impossible it was for her to allude to the bribe which had been promised her brother for undertaking this task. “Especially, I mean,” she continued, with a slight stammer, “when, as in

Arthur's case, he never is particularly clear about delivering a message."

"I certainly regret that I have been under a misunderstanding so far, Maude, but, as it has been so, I am going to ask you to let me in some measure remain so. Allow me to still think a little longer that I have not had my answer."

"Impossible," she said. "You will have a right to reproach me if I allow you any longer to remain in so false a belief."

"No, but hear me!" he cried. "You do owe me some slight compensation for the cruel mistake of which I have been the victim. All I ask is that you shall let things remain as they are till you go back to Clumford. It is but a very little time longer, and, without giving any necessity for treating me with coldness, I think I can promise that you will never be annoyed by the

repetition of that question unless I feel that I have far better grounds upon which to expect a favourable reply than I have as yet had."

What could the girl do ? Her cousin had, as she thought, been shamefully deceived. It was so small a concession that he asked that, unwilling as she was to make it, it seemed hard upon him to refuse. Then, again, his behaviour, while he deemed himself under probation, had been so admirable that there could be no great harm in allowing it to continue for two or three weeks more.

"I still think it better not, Fred, but, if you like, it shall be as you will. It will be your own fault if I am compelled to change my manner towards you ; but, be it clearly understood, that, when we leave town, with such words on your part still un-

spoken, that no engagement is *possible* between us."

"Thank you for granting me this much," he replied. "Scanty hope, I'll admit, but when a man loves in earnest, Maude, he is thankful for even a crumb or two of encouragement."

"There, you see," she returned, gently, "already we trench upon the forbidden ground."

"It shall be my last offending, unless your own manner unmistakably bids me to speak," and, slightly pressing her hand, the baronet took his departure.

"He is very nice," Maude murmured to herself, "as a cousin. What a pity he cannot content himself with that relationship! Heigh ho!" she continued, with a sigh, "what a pity it is, all my family and friends will say, and Arthur in particular,

that I cannot love him as a husband. It might have been, too, at one time, until I was fool enough to give my heart away to a man perfectly indifferent to its possession. Frederick may be in earnest, and I have no doubt he is, in his wish to marry me, but why he should make my hand the price for paying Arthur's debts, I am bound to say I cannot see."

Maude would scarcely have felt satisfied with the result of her concession, nor would she have thought by any means so highly of her cousin as she did at present, could she have overheard a slight conversation between her brother and Sir Frederick in the latter's drawing-room in Chesterfield Street.

"I did not do so badly!" exclaimed the baronet. "To have persuaded your sister to leave it an open question until we all leave town was no slight advantage—more,

almost, than I could have hoped—and the result I consider profound diplomacy on my part. But the business must now be considerably in your hands. It is for you to turn on the whole weight of the parental pressure. Daughters, of course, don't marry to order in these days, but fathers and mothers can exercise a good deal of persuasion for all that. I know thoroughly what it means for a girl to be in disgrace at home. Life is made none too rosy under those circumstances. You, too, must plead my cause with all the argument you are master of. Remember, Master Arthur, the retainer in your case is a pretty heavy one, and I am a man who look to have full value for my money. I directed Solano to inquire a little bit into your affairs."

"What the devil can he know about them, and what business are they of his?"

“For the matter of that, Solano would very quickly know a good deal about your or anyone else’s affairs that I told him to inquire into. He has means of acquiring such knowledge not to be understood by a young gentleman of your age. As to what business it is of his : as, in the event of my getting a favourable answer from your sister, he will have the settlement of them, it is just as well he should know something about them.”

“But,” said Arthur, drawing himself up with a feeble attempt at preserving his dignity, “I should prefer to settle them in my own person.”

“Yes—and prettily plucked you would get in the operation,” rejoined Sir Frederick, with a sneer. “No—when it comes to settling with the children of Israel, a guileless young Gentile like you is not of much

use. Solano, believe me, understands the ways of the money-lenders a good deal better than you do."

Arthur was in no position to dictate terms. When the usurer is at the gate, our demurrers are generally couched in a minor key. It is not often Portia intervenes in Antonio's behalf, and, as a matter of reality, Shylock has it pretty much his own way, even as in days of yore. Our paternal and never-ending legislature, which interests itself not only concerning our way to heaven, but as to when, and upon what terms, we shall partake of either food, drink, or amusement, and that has decreed our Sabbaths shall be passed in prayer and sadness, has also determined that the lesser the sinner in the matter of ordering that for which he is unable to pay, the greater shall be his punishment. To be a defaulter in hundreds,

is to be in no great trouble ; but, once let the petty tradesman get his victim in the County Court for a few pounds, and Shylock is a suckling babe in the art of usury compared to him. When paternal legislation has done exercising itself with insisting upon cramming our young working-people with learning, it will perhaps undertake the profitable and laudable work of establishing the co-operative store for "the million." Much money in that idea for the promoters, and the discomfiture, annihilation, and general crushing out of that hideous human parasite "the tally-man."

Poor Maude ! Unless the fates interfered in her behalf, was it likely she would extricate herself from this petty conspiracy ? Nothing melo-dramatic or sensational about it whatever—a mere ordinary little social plot, such as goes on under our noses per-

petually. An eligible proposal, strongly supported by the young lady's family—a well-defined certainty that either money or interest, or both combined, will be required to start brothers in the world, topped up with a first love affair gone askew, and I am afraid the maiden of the nineteenth century will yield to her destiny as easily as her predecessors did in those earlier times when the yea or nay were virtually no whit at their own option. Mrs. Riversley would not have been intentionally unkind to her daughter; she would have been the last woman in the world to persuade her into marrying a man whom she did not think calculated to make her happy. But it must be borne in mind that not only do mothers and daughters see things from very different points of view, but that in this case also Mrs. Mortimer and all her family were

quite in the dark about Sir Frederick's real character. Further, the good lady was no little piqued that it should be said a girl of hers was left to wear the willow. It would be such a triumphant rejoinder to the world to announce that Maude, though not engaged to Mr. Hainton, as people had so long anticipated, was about to contract a more brilliant marriage. She was untiring in preaching advice to her daughter on this subject, by pointing out how foolish it would be of her to neglect the best opportunity of taking her place in society that might be ever afforded her. Apt to think a good deal too much of society, and society's verdicts, was Mrs. Mortimer. As for the Rector, he only chorussed his wife's arguments, dwelling upon the perfections of his would-be son-in-law as he virtually saw him. Well-bred, well-mannered, and desirous of pleas-

ing, it was small wonder that Sir Frederick should pass as a paragon in the Curzon Street drawing-room. His aunt and uncle of course knew of his London crash ; they knew, moreover, that he had passed a vagrant and Bohemian sort of existence in all those years of exile ; but of the real truth of his past career they were utterly ignorant, or they would never have consented, much less urged, such a match on Maude.

It was the old story—a good many rejected suitors owe their final happiness to that persistent urging of their claims which always lies in the power of the lady's near relations. Then, again, Arthur was vehement in his appeals to his sister to save him from the consequences of his reckless extravagance. In vain did she indignantly represent that she could scarcely be expected to rescue him from his embarrassments, at

what she considered the price of her life's happiness. He argued as our friends and relations so constantly do, that they are better judges of what constitutes our happiness than ourselves, returning to the charge with all the pertinacity that might be expected from a man in desperate circumstances. It was in his nature to shrink from the disagreeables of life, and he deemed it far less unpleasant to worry his sister into marrying her cousin than to face that dire quarter of an hour with his father, which his circumstances would compel in the event of her declining. Gradually the girl's indignant refusal waxed weaker and weaker. She was worn out by the way in which this luckless love-suit was so continually urged upon her. She and Ethel had drifted far apart, and it was difficult to believe what close friends they had been only a few weeks back ; still,

she not only was a constant witness of John Hainton's continued devotion to Miss Clothele, but everywhere she went, heard their engagement spoken of as a settled thing. At times she thought of throwing herself upon her cousin's generosity; yet, upon consideration, this was not so feasible. She could not urge that her family were worrying her life out on his behalf, while he on his part had afforded her not the slightest pretext for speaking to him on the subject. He had adhered rigidly to their compact, never overstepping the limits assigned to him by a hair's breadth. She saw now the awkwardness of the situation into which she had been entrapped. To speak to him in this wise would be tantamount to saying "no" before she was asked to say "yes." She could not re-open the subject unless he gave her the opportunity; but one conviction

was fast growing upon her, that if they did not leave town very speedily her consent would be wrung from her for very weariness. She replied one afternoon to one of Arthur's passionate appeals, "Would you be very much obliged to me, if I did this thing for you, and accepted Frederick?"

"Of course I should, have I not told you over and over again that you only can save me? I know you think that I have got nothing to do but present my father with a list of my debts, be blown up for a quarter of an hour, then to have them satisfactorily settled and all will be forgiven; but girls cannot understand these things, and I tell you it would be by no means such a summer shower as that I should have to undergo."

"And if you thought this marriage might—I won't go so far as to say will—make me

unhappy for life, would you still urge me to consent to it ?”

“ Nonsense ! How could it make you unhappy for life ? Fred is a very good fellow, with quite sufficient income to give you everything a reasonable woman could require. You will save me, delight all your family, and make him—and I will confidently add yourself—happy.”

Locked in her own room, Maude paced up and down for more than an hour, turning the whole thing over in her mind. True, she did not love Frederick—but what was that ? Love, as far as she was concerned, was over. She should never love again. A common conclusion on the first disappointment of this nature. Her cousin was an agreeable, gentlemanly man enough ; all her people wished it ; it will rescue Arthur from his scrape ; and, after all, if she did not

love her cousin, had she not just told herself that love could never now have anything to do with marriage as far as she was concerned ; people she knew got on very well together whose union had been a matter of arrangement and not of sentiment. She remembered to have heard Lord Lithfield say, upon one occasion, " What a man really wants to go through the world with is a sensible, amiable companion, and not a sweetheart. Love is a selfish and tempestuous passion ; it is like champagne, we delight in it in our youth, but eschew it as we grow older." She and Ethel had rated him sharply for his cynicism, for what they deemed his infidel description of the most sacred of the passions in the eyes of woman. But what if he were right—if it is only in quite our youthful days that we are capable of really falling in love ? And the result of

all this battling with herself was that Maude told her mother that night, with a rather sickly smile, that if Sir Frederick still wished it, it should be as he willed.

Of course no time was lost in informing Sir Frederick that his wooing had come to a happy conclusion, and that he had now only to ask to receive a favourable reply. It need hardly be said that he took the earliest opportunity of asking Maude herself whether he might hope. The girl was fain to confess that he did it with great tact and delicacy. He said he should not have considered himself entitled to address her again on the subject if it had not been that her brother had ventured to assure him that there was hope for him, and that he did not presume to suppose that he could have won her love in so short a time. That was a prize for which he had yet to strive, but that if

she could grant him friendship and esteem, it would be the endeavour of his life to win that love which she was as yet unable to give him, and Maude, laying her hand in his, promised that she would be a true and dutiful wife to him.

Mrs. Riversley lost no time in announcing the state of affairs to all her friends and acquaintances. Sir Frederick was in high spirits, and received the congratulations of his friends in a fashion all untinged with a dash of that sarcasm which was now so prominent a trait in his character. It was settled that the marriage should take place in the early autumn at Clumford, and, with one exception, all those concerned seemed well satisfied that things bid fair to be brought to a happy conclusion. The exception was Solano, but he naturally kept his displeasure to himself, and contented himself with redoubling his

efforts to discover Marion Gardiner. He was sitting one morning after breakfast in Sir Frederick's sanctum talking over some matters of business with him, when a servant entered the room, and informed the baronet that a lady wished to see him.

"A lady wish to see me!" exclaimed the baronet, "nonsense. I can't see ladies at this hour of the morning, tell the lady I am not dressed, at the same time I am engaged on business with my solicitor."

Solano rose and looked out of the window. "Drives a deuced neat brougham, whoever she may be," he exclaimed. Solano could see the baronet's servant go to the window of the carriage. There was a short and apparently animated discussion for two or three minutes, and then the servant once more entered the room.

“Beg pardon, Sir Frederick, but the lady says she must see you for a few minutes. She says she will not detain you long, but that it is concerning a matter of the greatest importance.”

“Did she give her name?” inquired the baronet.

“No, Sir Frederick.”

“Ridiculous! go down again, Johnson, and tell her that it is impossible, and that I can see no one this morning, but that if she will leave her card, I will do myself the honour of calling upon her.”

The servant disappeared, once more Solano from his post of vantage saw a consultation go on at the carriage window. Another few minutes, and the servant once more entered the room. Sir Frederick turned fiercely round and exclaimed irritably,

“Confound it, Johnson, if you don’t know

how to civilly make people understand that I am not to be seen——”

“I beg your pardon, Sir Frederick,” interrupted Johnson hurriedly, and holding out a blank envelope, “but the lady desired me to give you this, and said that when you saw her name, she felt quite certain you would receive her.”

Sir Frederick tore open the envelope. It contained nothing but a lady’s visiting card. As he read it, the baronet turned white as a sheet, and ejaculated : “Good God ! after all these years !”

On that visiting ticket was engraved—

“LADY RIVERSLEY,

“CLEVELAND LODGE,

“MAIDA VALE.”

END OF VOL. II.

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